

HARVARD SERIES



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A MODERN QUIXOTE:

A

STORY OF SOUTHERN LIFE

BY

S. C. McCAY

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A MODERN QUIXOTE

CHAPTER I

A typical spring morning in the South; flower bed and blooming tree ablush with exquisite color. Everywhere exuberance of leaf and blossom on the old McNaughton place. Summer, always glorious in this region of middle Georgia, is masking in the splendor of her eternal youth, this once proud homestead of a once proud family.

By peering through the arbor-vitæ hedge which separates the "back yard" from the front part of the grounds, a stranger would view a characteristic scene worthy his notice. It is washing-day, and if you have never seen washing-day in the South, you will probably be surprised to hear it spoken of as one of the most picturesque scenes this country can show.

In the shadow of a thick clump of mul-

berry trees (not the fruit mulberry, but the umbrageous fan-leaved shade tree) stands a rustic bench supporting a number of huge tubs, all of a subdued natural wood color which harmonizes with the general effect of the knotty old tree trunks against which they are leaning. At a little distance from the washing-stand, a black pot, of very gipsy-like appearance, is standing upon its three short, sturdy legs amid the crackling, flaming sticks, constantly poked under it according to Aunt Viney's directions.

"Washing-day," she says, "ain't nuthin' to what it used ter wuz, on dis yere place. Why, Lawd! chile, I 'members, when my ole mis-sus wuz livin', it tuk nigh on ter a dozen hand to keep it gwine on; why, Honey! it tuk me'n Lucindy'n Altoony to battle de clo'es out when dey wuz dun washed; Unc' Ben, you 'members how many niggers had to go for to tote de wahter, an' all de little onery wufless pickaninnies on de place could'n do nuffin 'sides jes' to keep de pot bilin'."

The crimson-kerchiefed, white-turbaned figure of old black Viney, as the reader per-

ceives, is the presiding genius of the scene. She and old "Unc' Ben" are the sole remaining representatives of all that group of merry darkies, young and old, who, in happier days, made the old place ring with melody on washing-day. But alas! Aunt Viney cannot sing to-day; she goes about her work with a heavy heart. The old establishment of the McNaughtons, of which she considered herself a chief pillar, is hastening to its fall.

Both Ben and Viney were born on this old place, and considered themselves as much fixtures as the ivy-covered stables, almost untenanted now, or the sentinel poplars that guarded the garden front; but things had come to pass during the last few years, here on the old homestead, after which, anything, save the deluge, would seem to them an impotent conclusion.

Miss Laurie—or "Honey" as the two old darkies called her—was the motherless daughter of their young mistress, who a few short years ago, inherited on her marriage day the flourishing Hargrave estate with all its belongings. Willful as a young queen, Ruth Har-

grave had married Marshall McNaughton, then a dashing young officer fresh from the horrors of Indian battles, whose brilliancy, perhaps, blinded the young girl to possible delinquencies in her hero. Guardians and friends opposed the match bitterly; he was of obscure family and had risen to prominence by sheer personal bravery in the service. His education was defective, but his manner charming. Had her parents been alive, they would probably have prevented the marriage, but this dainty rose-leaf of a woman had all the fire of the South in her veins, and opposition from those about her fanned her resolution into a blaze.

She married him with great ceremony, and installed her handsome husband as master of the vast old estate, with all its acres and slaves. Perhaps, but for one disastrous event, the world would have been obliged to confess itself at fault; for, whereas it had predicted great misery from the *mesalliance*, the early years of the married life of the McNaughtons were an idyl of happiness. When little Laurie was about

four years old, came talk of that tragical mistake, the "Mexican war." It appealed to the military side of Marshall McNaughton's adventurous spirit, which rose to the occasion, and he was soon mounted and on the way, with a body of well-equipped followers, to the Rio Grande; his enthusiastic wife applauding his patriotism, and standing with her little daughter by her side to wave him a "good-bye." This was the fatal step; the life of the camp and field was what his soul loved, but it spoiled him forever for the higher life of home.

With the best that was in him he did homage to his beautiful wife, and under her influence he might still have been saved, but fortunately for the world's reputation for wisdom, and everlastingly unfortunate for him, she died soon after his return, leaving her little daughter to mock him with the lost mother's face at every turn, and the world's "I told you so" was vindicated.

It seemed as though while happiness might have saved this weak, generous nature, sorrow had wrecked it; old habits returned; early

training asserted itself, and he went back to the society of associates from whom the influence of his wife had alienated him for a time.

Notable among these was Hank Staples, a common fellow, but a sort of boon companion, who had been with McNaughton in his Mexican campaign, and who was enabled, by a mere chance, and without any great daring on his own part, to save the major's life on one occasion when the young officer's mad recklessness had placed it in jeopardy. This was sufficient to win him a certain place in the warm heart of his patron from which no revelation of meanness, no ill-bred presumption could dislodge him. Many people whispered that if the unsuspecting major ever had his eyes opened to a fact that was long ago patent to every one else—namely, that Hank Staples had presumed to fall in love with his pretty daughter—there would be an explosion of wrath, after which it would be difficult to find the remains of Mr. Staples. But, strangely enough, he did not see it. He had a tender, almost reverential regard for little Laurie, but it was not able to save him from

his degrading excesses; and just strong enough to drive him back to seek oblivion of his misconduct when she looked at him with her mother's eyes. And so, during the swift years in which she was growing into a beautiful womanhood, he had gone down the whole scale—had sunk from the wealthy owner of a fine old plantation and all its accessories, to the possessor of a grand house with some fields around it which he had not the means to cultivate. Slaves, acres and horses had gone, one by one, each new sale being followed by a more prolonged orgy with Hank Staples and his other friends.

Perhaps it was a certain loyalty to the choice of the young mistress, perhaps it was due to that empire over all hearts, which, in all his downward career, Marshall McNaughton never lost—but something bound the two old servants to the interests of the master with an unquestioning devotion.

"It's Hank Staples and all dat trash what am gwine to ruin my po' Mars'r," was the only reasoning their true hearts would admit.

"Honey soon be a grow'd young lady, Sis'

Viney. 'Pears like 'taint longer'n yestiddy, her ma wuz runnin' 'round yere dis like her; dey's jes' as much like one or nudder as two black peas is," mused Uncle Ben, leaning over to knock the ashes out of his pipe; for just then they caught sight of Laurie's pale pink muslin through the bushes, as she ran in her childish way down the garden path.

"Yes, tank Gawd!" responded Aunt Viney, "her ma's dresses jes' fit her; an' dat yonder pink muslin, what young miss use ter love, kase de major, he say she look jes' like a little chinquepin-rose in it, look jes' 'zactly same on Honey, an' she ain't done nuffin to it cep'n jes' put it on. Dat's de last one of 'em, Unc' Ben," she went on with a dolorous sigh, "and de Lawd know whar she gwine to git no mor'."

She thought in silence for a minute, and then added, "What's de use o' bein' purty if you ain't got no clo'es?"

This was a poser which Uncle Ben's masculine mind could not grapple with. He only shook his head.

"Well," he said presently, "sumpin' got to

be done, Sis' Viney; Honey be a havin' bo's arter while'n den she be a wantin' yearbobs and a heap o' things what she aint nebber been study'n 'bout befo'."

"Humph!" responded Aunt Viney scornfully, "dat show what fools men-folks is; Honey got mo' bo's now dan she kin shake a stick at."

This was hyperbole; Laurie had only one acknowledged beau at this time; but a woman who wouldn't exaggerate a little on that theme isn't half a woman. "Mas'r Walter Marlowe dead in lub wid Honey 'n Honey lub him too, but she don' know it yit."

"Bress de Lawd! yer don' say so, Sis' Viney. Mas'r Walter in lub wid our Honey! Yah! Yah! our little Honey! Why, dey allers play togedder since dey wuz little chillun—but hold on! Sis' Viney, yo' femining min' don' take in de sitiuation. How Dr. Marlowe's son gwine to marry our Honey when de ole gem'-man he kaint git 'long wid de major? Don' you know Honey's pa ain't nebber been to hear de doctor preach since young miss die, and he kum over yere to kin' o' comfort us

like, an' den, mas'r he jump up ouden his cheer'n he 'lowed he did'n want ter hear no sich nonsense; an' ef de Lawd did'n want him to go to de debbil, what fer he take 'way de only one what could save him? And den he went ouden de house an' kep' walkin' 'n walkin', all day out in de fields, by hissef; don' yer recollect dat, Sis' Viney? An' so," he went on, "I 'lows dat if de doctor is good way down in his heart, he ain't gwine to be willin' for his only son to mah'y de daughter of a man what talks 'gin 'ligion. No, ole 'oman, I reckon you's out in yer kalklations fur wunst."

"Shucks!" Aunt Viney ejaculated; "don' yer know ef Mas'r Walter Marlowe want ter do anyting he gwine ter do it; an' sides, de doctor he tink powerful sight o' Honey; an' he do anyting fer dat boy."

"Yes," consented Uncle Ben, "Mas'r Walter, he powerful fine young gem'man, but his ma and all his folks'll be 'gin his mahy'in us what ain't got no money. Why, dere ain't no fambly in de county cep'n what'd be proud to hab him fur dere daughters."

"Now you's hit de nail on de head at las'," assented the practical Viney; "dat's what I 'low to myself; Mas'r Walter's ma, she powerful proud; 'deed she is."

At this point the dialogue was cut short by the report of a rifle from the direction of the river which was hidden from view by the thick spring foliage, and towards which Laurie had gone a few minutes before.

Without a word further than a profane exclamation from Aunt Viney, both started in the direction of the sound. Aunt Viney had soon reached the bank and signaled that it was all right. A beautiful white bird, called by the negroes the "white heron," was beating his snowy wings in hopeless conflict with the tide which bore him rapidly down the stream. On the bank also, though some distance away, stood the tall, lithe figure of young Marlowe concealed partly from view by the thick bushes. He was busily engaged in examining the lock of his rifle and reloading it for further use. Laurie, who had not seen him, stood, wringing her hands in sympathetic pain, as she watched the beautiful creat-

ure float down the stream, with the death wound in its breast. She had not dreamed that any one was near (as it was a school-day at the college of S—near by) until the loud bang! made her look up from her hammock too late to avert the tragedy. At a sign from his master a large brown setter sprang into the water, seized the huge bird, now dead, in his mouth, and laid it at Laurie's feet. The young fellow in the meantime, by a succession of leaps from rock to rock, had also gained her side, and grounding his rifle with one hand pulled off his cap with the other. What a handsome face it was! bright and smiling now, for he was sure that he had pleased the capricious little lady.

"Look what I have shot for you, Laurie!" pointing with his cap to the bird at her feet; "you said you wanted a white wing to make a fan for commencement and—"

"Oh! you bad boy; how could you do it?" she exclaimed with a little sob, and refusing his proffered hand.

"What! you don't want it? Well, by Jove! ingratitude, thy first name is Laurie!" replied the poor fellow crestfallen.

"G'way from dar! g'way from dar!" screamed Aunt Viney from her position in the bushes, as the dog was about taking the bird in his mouth again. She ran to it, and, kneeling down, spread the large white wings out upon the ground. This was too much for Laurie; she had long wanted just such a fan as these beautiful wings would make; she would not have had the peerless white thing murdered for her for worlds, had she known it; she had a tender little heart, that loved every living thing of field or stream. She looked down on the beautiful plumage; the bird was dead, and the wings were so lovely; she began to relent.

Walter saw his advantage, and, leaning his rifle against a tree, knelt down also, and helped Viney to display the trophy. "Now!" he exclaimed, "cruel woman, how does that strike you? Aren't they handsome?" She was not angry now, but when he looked up at her he was shocked to see that her eyes were full of tears. "O Walter, I am so sorry you killed it, but it was very kind of you to give it to me; indeed I do thank you."

"Reck'n I'll jes' take it up to de house and dry out de wings fur yer, Honey," remarked the practical member of the party.

"Yes, you can go, we don't want you," said Walter. "I will walk back with Laurie in time for dinner." He and Viney had always been the best of friends; she would let him say anything to her.

"Nebber min', young man," she replied, as she shouldered the huge bird and started towards the house. "You's jes' de wustest boy in dis yere town; you knows you is; if you don' stop dem yere larks o' yourn, you ain't nebber gwine to heb'n long side o' yo' pa."

They did not hear her "Yah! Yah!" after she considered herself at a safe distance; "Mas'r Walter de purtiest man I eber see. I hope he gwine ter mah'y Honey'n take her up to his big house, kase I don' know what gwine ter kum o' her ef her pa keep goin' on in dis yere awful way o' hisen;" which proves that Aunt Viney was something of a woman of the world in her way. Could she have divined what took place after she left them, she would have considered her brightest dream realized.

CHAPTER II

Laurie must have forgiven the young fellow for killing the bird, for they were strolling along the romantic little river's brink in an amicable way, the little flickers of shadow and sunlight dancing upon them as they walked. He had his gun over his shoulder and the brown setter Carlo amused himself by running, now before, now behind them, but always keeping them in sight.

"What are you doing out of college to-day? I did not expect to see you on Friday;" she asked him, trying to look demure; but she could not hide from this tall, handsome fellow, as she looked up at him, that she was glad to be surprised, and supremely happy to have him there walking beside her, when so many girls as pretty as she, and far more fortunate in every other way, would have welcomed him proudly. "O! you truant!" she went on, while the happy smile danced in her eyes,

"I thought you were working for the valedictory this year; you know too, how much we all counted on you; have you given up?"

"Well; sit down here on this rock, and I will tell you how it is," he said at last. She seated herself with a little laugh of happiness, and he chose a lower place, so that he sat at her feet, for he wanted to see her face while he told her. He looked so handsome as he sat there, leaning towards her, in his eager way, the morning sunlight shining in his face.

A brilliant face it was, with the clusters of dark hair thrown back from the forehead, and the gleam of snowy teeth and flashing eyes. It was a beauty to which perfect health, perfect happiness, and a generous heart each lent a share. There was one thing which a friend of Walter Marlowe would have eliminated from that face, but which, to the romantic young girl beside him, was, perhaps, its greatest charm; it was a certain look of recklessness, born of an adventurous spirit and excessive physical courage, which won credence for many tales of midnight escapade connected with his college life.

True, there had never been a hint of anything dishonorable attached to his name, even in his wildest frolics, but he was classed among the wild fellows of the college. Perhaps the town's people were more lenient in their judgment of him than of the others, for he had lived always in their midst and was known to them all from childhood. He had evidently forgotten what he was going to say; he sat looking into her face in such an unusual way that for the first time in his presence, she felt her cheeks begin to tingle.

"Well," said she, pulling some little grasses in a nervous way—"why don't you tell me?"

"O! that's so—well, I was just going to say that the honors were distributed this morning, and a lucky fellow, whom you know, has come in for the valedictory; so there isn't anything more to do at the college this morning, and I thought I would take a stroll, and see if I could find anything to shoot."

"O! Walter, I'm so glad!" cried Laurie, all her self-consciousness gone now. "Kneel down here and be crowned, sir." He dropped

on one knee and she went through the pantomime of crowning him.

They were laughing and talking in that happy, foolish way that marks so brief, so fleeting an epoch of life; both were beautiful, young, and in love.

"Have you thought of your valedictory speech?"

"Oh! yes," he said, "I have been rehearsing it as I came along. I shall get through it all right if there is *one* person in the audience."

"Rather a small audience otherwise," put in Laurie.

"And if it pleases her, I don't care for the rest," he went on, scorning to notice the interruption. "Do you know who that is?"

"How should I know?" returning to her grasses again.

"She will be the prettiest girl in the house, and she will carry a white wing for a fan."

"Oh! did you have that speech rehearsed too?"

"Of course, and engaged the heron to come here and be shot. But, Laurie, there is something else on my mind this morning a great

deal more important than that. Come, let us walk on to that spot further down where it is so shady and cool, and I will tell you about it."

Viney thought they looked very handsome and very happy, an hour or two later, when she looked up from her work and saw him leave her at the garden gate, and stop again when he was almost out of sight, to blow a kiss to her from his finger tips. Laurie stood still and watched him until she could no longer get a glimpse of his figure, and then, all in a minute, down came a flutter of pink muslin among the husks of the corn Aunt Viney was preparing for dinner; two little white arms were around her neck, and her darling's love story was sobbed out in happy tears upon her faithful old bosom.

"Oh! mammy! Walter loves me; he loves me more than anybody else in all the world! He told me so, and I am going to marry him on commencement day. Oh, mammy dear, I am so happy! I love him so much."

The old nurse had taken her darling into her arms, and patted her gently, as she used

to do to hush her infant crying. She was, herself, too full to speak, for a moment. This was the dream of her life; Honey would be happy and rich. She leant over, still holding Laurie in her arms, and picked up the straw hat that had fallen on the ground and smoothed out the ribbons with a loving touch. Then she tried to raise the dear face from her shoulder. The girl was still crying softly, for very joy, but even these happy tears pained the tender old heart.

“Why, what make you cry so, Honey? Ef you’s happy, you ought to be laughin’. I’s powerful glad you’s gwine to mah’y Mas’r Walter; you’ll hab lots o’ purty dresses, an’ breas’pins to war’ ebbery Sunday, an’ ole Viney’ll set up in de gal’ry an’ watch you sittin’ in de Marlowe’s pew. Yo’ pa he comin’ home to his dinner purty soon an’ he mustn’t find his baby cryin’ nohow. You jes’ run ’long while I gits de dinner ready and bresh out yer ha’r, an’ tell him all ’bout it, when he comes; I spec’ he be powerful proud.”

But the major did not return to dinner that

day; supper time came—the early supper time of the country houses—and as he was still away, they took the simple meal without him. It was not unusual for him to remain in town until late in the evening.

Laurie went to her little chamber all white and flower-scented, as such a maiden's room should be, but she did not go to sleep as usual; she sat down on the side of her snow-white cot in the fair twilight of the spring, her dark, glorious hair falling about her, and dreamed her waking dream, more sweet than sleep could give. While sitting there she was aroused from her reverie by her father's foot-step sounding in the room below. It was, still, quite early in the evening and her thoughts would not let her sleep.

She threw around her a wrapper of some soft, white material and stole quietly downstairs again. She paused at the dining-room where the major always loved to take his pipe in the evening. Uncle Ben had brought in the candles and wheeled the master's leather arm-chair to its accustomed place by the hearthstone; for the nights were still a

little chilly, though the spring was well advanced. His pipe and a decanter of brandy stood on a small table at his elbow. He had poured out a glass, but scarcely tasted it. There was a haggard expression on his handsome, dissipated face quite new to Laurie.

He lit the pipe, and looked around once or twice, as though in search of something or some one; presently the fire died out of it, and he laid it down upon the table unfinished. What was the matter with the pipe to-night? What was the matter with the brandy?

She must have known what it was he missed; for presently her arms were about him and a warm, rosy cheek was laid against his. "Is that you, Honey?" he asked laughing; and reaching up an arm he pulled her down into his lap.

"Come here and sit on your old daddy's knee, and tell him what you've been doing all day."

Laurie passionately loved her father; to blame him was to lose her favor entirely, and as a great many did blame him very severely, she kept aloof from a great many houses

where she would have been welcomed for her mother's sake, but where she knew that her father was not liked.

To sit on his knee, and get her arm around his neck was easy enough; she was used to that; but to tell him all that had happened that day was not so easy. She looked into the fire for a moment and began running her hands through his hair. "Walter was here this morning, papa," she began; managing so that he could not see her face.

"Well—that's no news, tell me somethin' else."

"Well, he's got the valedictory, papa, and he gave me a beautiful wing—for a fan, and he wants me to go to commencement—papa—and hear him speak."

"Well, Honey, you are goin' ain't you? Walter's a fine young fellow; I'm glad he's got it."

"Yes, papa, but if I go, you must get me a new white dress."

"Well, I'll see about it, pet, I'll see."

"But, papa, I must have it soon, for mammy and I must make it before commencement."

"Well you shall have it, baby; you shall have it."

"But, papa—"

"Why, what ails my pet? Is there somethin' else you're wantin'? Speak out, Honey, your old daddy'll do anything to make you happy. There won't be no girl there that'll hold a candle to my Laurie, I'll bet. That'll be a great day for you, when your friend gits the first prize, eh? You always did bet on Walter, didn't you, Honey?"

"Yes, dear, it will be the greatest day of all my life, for it will be my wedding-day. That pretty white dress will be my wedding-dress—for Walter loves me, oh! so dearly, and asked me to marry him on that day. You won't say no, dear daddy? I love him so! I love him so!"

The arms went closer about his neck, and the rosy face was pressed hard against his shoulder.

CHAPTER III

Aunt Viney was right when she opined that "Mas'r Walter's ma" would be the stumbling block. While her husband loved this son, as the dearest gift of providence, she idolized him, but still she worshiped him in her own proud way. Though her will in all great crises bent before the stern strength of purpose in her husband's character, still she was a woman of strong opinions, strong feelings and prejudices. Walter was her only living child, and would inherit through her an independent fortune. She saw that he was handsome, intelligent and spirited, and built boundless hopes upon his future; consequently, his marriage would be a matter of supreme moment with her. She believed in love matches, for her own had been one. Had she not taken her own course when the young preacher wooed her in his manly way, showing towards her the tenderness of his steadfast spirit, so

stern in self-denial, so impervious to all other weakness? What did it matter that he had renounced fortune and lucrative occupations for his high calling? She revered his sublime unworldliness but never dreamed of reaching the level of it herself; she could not have said truthfully that she desired it. And this woman looked proudly on her manly son, so like herself, and yet was blind enough to think that she could mold his will to hers, and tell him where to love.

She was proud of his popularity, proud of his scholastic honors, and the old name he bore, and what more natural than that he should make a brilliant marriage? But with all this deep love between mother and son, there was a shade of habitual reserve, imparted, perhaps, from her own nature to his, which barred out many little confidences that might have aroused her from this dream of security.

In the meantime he ran his college course, much as any of his young acquaintance.

She laughingly told a friend one day, that she was glad to say her boy "had not thought

about the girls yet." She was sure that when he entered society in earnest he would select some aristocratic girl for his wife, who would reflect credit on his taste and family. And so the fond mother built her palace of cards, sitting in her darkened, flower-scented chamber this spring day, while Walter and Laurie told their story to each other by the vine-shaded river-path.

Mrs. Marlowe had never quite forgiven Ruth Hargrave for marrying so far out of her station, but they had been good friends in their young days, and the survivor felt always a kindly interest in Ruth's little daughter; but the major, with his loud voice and terrible grammar, was a trying ordeal for the fastidious woman to endure for an hour. Laurie, morbidly sensitive where this dear old father of hers was concerned, divined this feeling and gradually ceased making her visits there.

Walter thought he knew the tender secret of her absence. The old doctor often looked over his spectacles and asked why she never came, but the mother said nothing. She was far indeed from suspecting a present danger,

but it was part of her plan that the intimacy between her son and the major's daughter should not survive his boyhood; and she felt that fate was playing into her hand. She thanked her good star, and kept silent, for she dreaded, as she dreaded nothing else, the stern reproach that would gather in her husband's eyes when the expression of such a feeling would sometimes escape her.

Walter came to her this day, a happy smile illumining the beauty of his face, and there was great tenderness in the way this tall boy bent down and kissed her on the forehead. He sat down beside her, took both her hands in his and told her his heart's story; told her, in his own eloquent way, how he loved the beautiful girl with all the strength of his nature, and that he could never be happy without her. "I meant to tell you this, mother," he went on, "before I spoke to her; but I saw in her pretty eyes this morning how glad she was of my success; she looked so sweet in her enthusiasm about it, that almost before I knew it I told her all."

This was true, he had meant to tell her,

but put it off, as one will an unpleasant task, as long as possible. He had expected opposition at first, for he knew the nature of his mother's plan for him; but he was not prepared for the look of anger that gathered in her eyes as she heard him. She withdrew her hands from his clasp, for the first time in his life, and folded them firmly in her lap, while she listened in silence.

Then he saw how foolish had been his hope that she would put by her ambitious dreams, when she saw how deeply his happiness was centered in Laurie. He saw, before she spoke, that he would never, by all his pleading or all her love for him, be able to win her from her enmity against his marriage with Marshall McNaughton's daughter. He felt the chill of her disapproval, and his eager enthusiasm vanished; he resented it for Laurie's sake.

He paused and looked at her a moment full in the eyes; each saw the determination of the other—how like they were at that moment.

"Go on;" she spoke for the first time; her face was pale with suppressed anger.

He straightened himself in his chair, and in an altered tone told her curtly and in a few words that his choice was unchangeable; that he had hoped she would consider his happiness sufficiently to lay aside any prejudice she might have in the matter, and receive the motherless girl kindly; but, that, anyhow, his troth was plighted to Laurie and his happiness as well as his honor depended upon his keeping it—at any cost.

“You have disappointed me bitterly,” was all she said as she gathered her sewing together and left the room. Such an ending to such a day! He knew what it meant; his father would be on his side, and she would submit to the inevitable and receive his wife,—he knew that; but it would be with that immutable protest in her heart and in her manner; and how could he bring that tender-hearted child to such a home?

He went out of the house with a bitter resentment in his heart against his mother; she who had been so indulgent to his every whim, and so devoted to his interest always, now in this first great need had failed him. The re-

action from his joy of the morning was horrible.

After an hour's aimless wandering in the woods he came to a decision. As his anger began to cool he reflected that he had not been very considerate, perhaps; the revelation had surprised her; he would make one more earnest effort to reconcile her, and induce her to receive Laurie kindly.

But it was as he thought; his father listened gravely to his story, and said that if he truly loved the girl, and she loved him, it was right in the sight of God, that he should marry her; but, though the mother said nothing further in protest, and even went to see Laurie and conformed to all the conventionalities of approval, Walter knew that in her heart she was embittered against his choice, and would not forgive the girl who had won her son from her. He determined that Laurie should not know of this, if it was in his power to prevent it; and trusted to fate.

It was not hard for him to hide anything from Laurie. Walter loved her; that was enough and she was too happy to question

anything. And as for the major, that any man should win his little girl was in his eyes a thing to be thankful for; it never occurred to him that there was anything that one could object to in that.

CHAPTER IV

If Marshall McNaughton had succeeded in blinding himself to the progress he had made on the downward road in C— during the past few years, his eyes were opened the morning after Laurie's revelation when he rode into town and proceeded to purchase the white dress he had promised.

His loving heart was vacillating between sympathy with her great happiness, and grief at losing her. Memories of her young mother were mingled with his thoughts of Laurie; and as he rode along the familiar road, with slackened rein, tears from the purest spring in the nature of this anomaly of a man, rose to his eyes and blotted the well-known landscape from his sight.

Old "Senora," the mare, took her head with an easy pace and brought up at "Hartley's," as the place containing the best bar-room was called. To do the major credit, he had

not intended to stop there this morning, but his thoughts were far away in other days, and so long as Senora had stopped, expecting her noonday siesta and her customary meal at the racks before the Hartley stables, he thought he would just step in and have a word with the convivial fellows sure to be gathered there.

He was not disappointed in his expectation of finding several boon companions of his former revels lounging idly about the place. Marshall McNaughton was a man of magnificent presence, more than six feet high, and though he bore the marks of years of dissipation in many ways upon him, still wore a commanding air, and created a sensation always when he entered a room. His heavy locks, considerably frosted with silver, framed a face still handsome and engaging.

He paused at the doorway, as magnificent a figure of a man as ever walked to ruin under its portal. The graceful sweep of a large felt sombrero shaded his face; and he held a heavy riding whip (merely from habit) in his hand; had a lash of one-half the weight been laid upon Senora in his sight, it would have

brought a quick and terrible reckoning with her master. He loved many men, hated a few, but his devotion to his daughter and his horse was this man's religion.

All rose and gave him the seat of honor. The clink of glasses went merrily round again, and after not "a few," but many drinks he told himself he was better able to execute the delicate commission for which he had come to town.

He did not remember that it had been quite a while since he had attempted to make a purchase in C— outside of "Hartley's," and the unstinted liberality of the proprietor there could have been read between the lines of numerous notes of hand which were piled up in the money drawer with the major's signature upon them. Some said that it was a thing that might happen whenever it so pleased this complacent creditor, for his old house and all its belongings to be put up and sold at auction any day before his eyes.

The story had already become known to the small commercial world of C—, and when he entered the principal store of the town,

and in an off-hand way ordered the handsomest and most expensive articles that could be bought—little Laurie should have the best; why not?—he was ignominiously refused them, unless he could pay for them on the spot.

To be refused credit in the South, in a town where you have lived, is an insult, deep and degrading. It came upon this man like lightning from the blue sky; it showed him with terrible vividness many things that he had been vaguely conscious of but had never forced himself to look upon before. He staggered beneath the blow. He repeated the effort in several other stores in the town, with like results; and, as the summer evening was closing in, he mounted Senora and turned towards home, cut to the heart, both by the indignity he had suffered and his failure to keep his promise to Laurie.

It was not yet quite sunset, and he could reach home before dark. He thought of how she would be watching for him, and speed down the avenue to meet him, when she fancied she heard the old mare's hoofs approaching; she would always put her little

foot on top of his in the stirrup and bring her lithe young body up to his level with a single spring; then, with her arms about him, give him a welcoming kiss.

He had always felt here was one being in the world in whose sight he held the place of honor. But his eyes were opened now and his thoughts were bitter against himself as he rode homeward in the light of the closing day. He had meant to do so well by little Laurie, and what had he done? The veil had been ruthlessly torn from his conduct, and he had to face some hard questions which his conscience was putting to him as he returned from his fruitless errand, a ruined man—he saw it at last, broken in spirit and crushed in self-respect.

“Yes,” he accused himself—“I have spent her fortune, and humiliated her all these years in the eyes of C—. In the first important crisis of her life, I have not been able to make the most necessary provision for her;” and, for the first time, he felt to-day that her loving greeting would pain him; he could not bear to meet her with this feeling so strong upon

him; he halted abruptly in the road, and turned the mare's head in another direction; he made an errand of some kind in the neighborhood that would keep him until he supposed she would be safely in bed.

But that was unnecessary; for the first time his little girl had not been watching for him; she had at last found thoughts which he did not share.

He would not see her to-night; he would put it off till to-morrow, at least; it would be easier then. He lingered until the evening was far spent, and the household asleep, and then entered his house crushed and dispirited.

The question of the dress was not broached the next morning; Laurie had thought he would bring it, and felt just a little shade of disappointment, but she was too happy to worry about it this morning; Walter was coming to take her for a horseback ride, and her eyes sparkled with anticipation, when she ran into the breakfast room and gave him his morning kiss.

She seated herself opposite him with a little

air, very new and very womanly, and poured out his coffee; but she soon began to chatter away in her old childish manner, and it was some time before she noticed that he was making but a very poor pretense of eating; she noticed that his face was pale and haggard and had a depressed look altogether new to her.

She dropped her knife and fork in an instant and was at his side. "Oh! papa, dear, what makes you look so white and miserable?" the quick tears coming into her big dark eyes; "I have been happy all this time while you have been in trouble—I am a cruel, selfish thing! Dear me"—this *sotto voce*—"I reckon I have been too happy; I was afraid I was;" then, after a moment, "but I won't do it any more—no, indeed." He could not bear this; he rose abruptly and walked to the window; she stood irresolute for a moment not knowing whether to cry or not—then followed him. He had his face turned from her; he could not bear, with this new sense of humiliation upon him, to look at her. Her loving trust in him was now a reproach that touched him to the quick.

She pressed her cheek against his sleeve and waited; still he could not look at her, and tell her how low he had fallen in the eyes of his fellow men. He hoped she would not ask him about the wedding-gown until he could think of some expedient by which he could raise sufficient money to buy it. He tried hard to think of something to say to her, and could not.

"Dear daddy, are you angry with me?" came in little sobbing tones at last. This was too much—in a moment he had told her all; how he had tried, and failed, to keep his promise to her; cursing his own folly in that he had failed to do a father's part by her.

Then the smile shone through the tears,—was that all? She put her hands lovingly upon his lips, and would not let him upbraid himself. She charmed away the evil spirit in him, and even now, true to his mercurial nature, the crisis being past, his spirits began to rebound; and he ended this extraordinary interview by saying:

"But don't you spoil your pretty eyes acryin' 'bout it, pet; we'll have a bonny weddin' yet."

To make her smile, that was his aim always, and he managed to assume something of his old manner. "Who's that yonder?" he said, taking her face between his hands and turning it toward the avenue—"canterin' up the road leadin' t'other black horse? Wonder who he's after?" His simulated cheerfulness imposed upon her, and she went off comforted, but he found the problem of ways and means harder than any he had ever undertaken before. He paced the walk until the morning sun was near its noon, and still he saw no way out of his dilemma.

Happily, however, another council was in secret session on the same subject, and it was more successful in coming to a verdict.

Aunt Viney was scraping potatoes at a high shelf just outside the kitchen door, and Uncle Ben, in his position of maid of all work, to which he had descended by slow degrees, was scouring knives on a flat rock which served for a doorstep.

"'Pears to me, Sis' Viney, de major's got sumpin in his mind lately," he remarked. "I ain't h'yearn him swar more'n wunst or twicet

since he came from town yistiddy; an' I 'low to myself he's takin' on kase Honey be gwine away befo' long."

"Humph! chile; he got heap o' 'tings 'sides dat on his min'. I tell yer, he feel powerful bad kase he ain't got no land nor niggers nor nuffin to give her, de day what she gits mar'd, like all white folks does—all de folks what's quality. Honey, she don' kere nuffin 'bout it, kase she ain't nebber been nowhar 'mong udder gals; 'n Mas'r Walter, it don' make no diffunce to him; he say, 'Nebber min', sweet-heart, all mine's gwine ter be yo's purty soon;' an' he don' let on how bad his ma feel 'bout it. I tell yer Mis' Marlowe's powerful proud—'deed she is!"

Uncle Ben finished his knives and, setting himself down in the kitchen door in the sun, fell into a deep study. After sitting silently for some time, he cleared his throat several times and finally said:

"Sis' Viney!"

"Humph?" To understand this responsive interrogation, one must have heard it.

"'Pears to me Mars' Marsh he need some money powerful bad."

"I spec' he do, Unc' Ben; but I don' know whar he's gwine to git none at." Silence again for a few minutes, then in the same tone—

"Sis' Viney."

"I hear yer, Unc' Ben;" she knew what he was going to say; it had been in her thoughts all day, too.

"Don' it 'pear to you like 'taint correspondin' like to hab niggers, when he so poor, till he caint buy no weddin' clo'es fur Honey?"

"It cert'ny do 'pear kin' o' onsuitable, Unc' Ben."

"Jes' me an' you; dat's all dat's lef', ole 'oman."

"I know it, Unc' Ben."

"Well, which one it gwine ter be, Sis' Viney—you or me?"

"It's in de Lawd's han' I reckon, Unc' Ben," was her only reply to this. She was so busy about the fire that he could not get a glimpse of her face.

"Well, I bin stud'n 'bout it powerful heap to-day," continued the old man, "an' I 'lows its jes' like dis; we mus'n't say nuffin' 'tall 'bout

it to Honey; fur ef she knows what wuz gwine on, she take on so, till she jus' break her heart, and ourn too; but we's jis' got to 'cide 'tween ourse'ves which one us got to go, and den we'll lay de case befo' de major. He'll cuss de nigger blue what 'poses it, fur he ain't gwine ter like de idee; but I tink, fur Honey's sake, he do mos' anyting; an' ef we's got to be sol', mought jes' as well be now, when de money do Honey some good, as fur to wait fur de sheriff, and you knows dat gwine ter happen fo' long."

This was hard sense, Aunt Viney had to admit, but how was she going to talk about any scheme that might separate her from her baby? The wisdom of the plan had been patent to her mind a long time, but as to which of them it should be, that could be seen at a glance, she thought; how could anything go on about the place, and most of all, what would Laurie do without her? She put the case thus before her "feller sarvint," but it seemed he had entrenched himself behind an argument equally as powerful.

"Well, it 'pears kin' o' *dis* way ter me," he

said; "when Honey go to lib wid de Marlowes she hab a whole passel o' niggers to wait on her; but ef ole Ben go 'way who gwine ter stay wid mas'r? an' what's gwine to cum o' Snorer? Any fool nigger—cep'n me—what cum nigh her she kick 'em higher'n a kite sho nuff; an' who gwine ter go 'long and bring mas'r home safe o' nights when he stay in town late?"

So they talked and talked, the matter getting farther and farther from a settlement, until at last it was decided to appeal to chance, the god which in his heart every darkey holds in superstitious awe but thinks may sometimes be propitiated; and accordingly an old battered "seb'n-pence" was fished up from Uncle Ben's trousers' pocket where he had long carried it for luck, and they prepared to toss for it.

Aunt Viney demurred again; the coin that was supposed to have brought luck to its owner so long would certainly do so again and she demanded fair play. This was settled, however, by his allowing her to choose sides, a privilege also supposed to bring fortune; and

unconscious of the sublimity of their act they prepared to invoke the irrevocable fiat, for neither would have dreamed of appealing from the verdict.

Uncle Ben solemnly turned the worn bit of silver over and over in his hand and scrutinized it on both sides; it was invested with a new interest—it was to decide his fate.

With bated breath they stepped out on the little plateau under the mulberries where the grass had been worn away by the faithful feet of these two old servants, and Uncle Ben began to choose his ground; Aunt Viney looking on in awed silence. The stake for which they played was a few more years of toil and privation on the dear old place, where every homely object was a shrine at which their fond hearts worshiped; and the privilege of spending their allotted years in the service of those for whose sake they would even go, if it should be their lot, uncomplaining. Aunt Viney had chosen "heads." By tacit consent both stood silent and gazed at the familiar scene where their lives had been spent, taking in every detail with its associations of more than half a century.

Down there on the old swamp road Uncle Ben had taught "Honey" and Honey's mother to ride on horseback. Over here went the path by which he had led the old Senora to water night and morning for so many years. Over there to the west lay the fields where he had labored in the cotton rows side by side with Tuny of the lustrous eyes. Ah! those old days when cotton was king! Then the nights when the moon was full, and the dance before the cabin doors—for Tuny with the yellow skin and speaking eyes was belle of the quarters,—poor old Tuny, dead and buried long ago.

Aunt Viney looked longest towards the spot where a willow stood sentinel over some quiet graves. There lay the young "Miss," the idol of her life, where they had laid her down before the dark days came. Like a white thread over the green hill ran the track her feet had made as she led her darling's little daughter, night and morning, to her mother's grave. Then she could see the little path branch off towards another enclosure, almost invisible now to the dim old eyes, where the

faithful servants of the family rested from their toils and some of her own little pickaninnies slept their long sleep. It was their world, their all, how could they leave it?

The sun sank below the hills. The curtain was down upon the closing act, and the last of the actors must disperse. With a sigh that was almost a moan they came back to the present. The old man proceeded to toss.

"Now she's gwine!" he said in an excited whisper, and up went the coin, flashing an instant; down it came again through the leaves overhead, and lay upon the ground a few feet from them. They looked into each others' faces a moment while their hearts stood still with fear, then knelt down to read their fate.

The worn outline of head lay uppermost.

Without a word, the old fellow picked up the coin and put it in his pocket and taking his old straw hat from the ground, turned and walked away towards the stables.

"'Fore Gawd!" was Aunt Viney's only remark, as she remained stupefied, on her knees, and looked after his retreating figure.

The bitter tears shed by that fond old heart as he hid his face in the mare's silky mane and clasped his arms around her neck, none but "Snorer" knew, and she could never tell.

CHAPTER V

The major received the old darkey's proposition much as Uncle Ben had expected; nor was the ultimate result other than that he had foreseen. Here was another blow to that pride to which until two days ago the master had held so firmly. This man had known for a long time that he was giving ground, though he had parried the strokes of his enemy, circumstances, desperately, and refused to admit to himself that he was being beaten; but now, by a little turn of the blade, he was disarmed, and after his experience in town that day he had no heart to resist longer.

He listened to the old negro's words; and low as it made him seem in his own sight, this proposition, which a week ago he would have scorned, showed him an outlet from the wall of difficulties that seemed closing around him; and swearing at first that he would never listen, he surrendered to it at last.

This thought of selling the old negro, who was part of the inheritance left to Laurie by her mother, lowered him more in his own eyes than any act of his erratic life which had made it necessary; and yet the motive which actuated him in it arose from the purest instinct of his nature—his passionate love for his little daughter. What imperfect, what unjust judges of ourselves we are, after all!

It was a hard task to bring himself to consent to this, the only available means that he could see for raising even the small sum of money necessary to provide for his Laurie's wedding, but when it was decided, it gave him some little feeling of pleasure to think she would not be humiliated, anyway. She should have the prettiest white dress in the town, and what was one more pang of self-reproach, one more bitter memory added to his long account, compared to the mortification and disappointment he had felt was in store for her? After all he thanked God it was old Ben's thought not his; and he took a drink of brandy twice the usual size.

To keep up appearances for the little one's sake until she was honorably married, that was all he asked; beyond that, with a sort of fatal premonition, he would not look.

He made himself no idle promise of reformation in his ways; he knew he would not change for the better now. There was a recklessness added to his former hilarity, which no one, perhaps, but the two old darkies, noticed; who were thankful when they saw it that their darling was provided for.

Thus the drama swept on to its *denouement* with its deep under-currents of love, duty, sacrifice, bearing on to its destination the little rose-colored sail that carried Laurie "and her fortune." The girl, in the meantime, pure, and loving even to the old trees under which she had played, lived unconscious of the dark shape that waited on her footsteps. Walter loved her—that was enough.

She had quite made up her mind that she did not want the new dress; she had been selfish, she told herself, to distress poor "daddy" about it. There was still a remnant of old finery in a chest in the attic which

would do very well; Aunt Viney and she would rip off the lace, and with its help readorn the remains of some fabric which had seen previous service. What did it matter? Had not Walter said it made no difference? It had been no new thing for her father to promise her the most preposterous things in all good faith and forget the circumstance entirely; she hoped it would be so now, and seeing his embarrassments, resolved to say nothing more about the matter.

On the other hand, he avoided the topic religiously and trembled for fear she should suspect the plot between old Ben and himself, and in her loving, impulsive way put an end to it.

She had risen early one morning and, ensconced in her favorite position, was working industriously on a sketch which had occupied much of her time of late when Walter was not by; it was a sketch of this spot so dear to the lovers' hearts, and she intended it as a parting gift to her father. Through unforeseen events the work was never completed and the world has missed the opportunity of pass-

ing on its merits. It was supposed by many to be a representation of an Arctic explorer's fleet under full sail

But what did it matter? Nature was in its springtide on the earth, and in her heart, what did she want from art? Leave that great consoler for the dear faded old mam'selle for whom youth, beauty and love, are over. How could she work on such a morning with all the glad sights and sounds of summer claiming her eyes and ears? It was indeed a rarely beautiful spot, this trysting place; the water there was clearer and the shade more dense and cool than in any other place in all the world, they thought; and to one of them afterwards, in great misery, the scene came out on the dark ground of the present with heart-breaking vividness.

Gradually the charm of the scene began to work upon her, the book slid from her lap and the old reverie took empire in her thought again.

There was just one little canker spot in the flower of her great joy; she suspected that Walter had some trouble upon his mind, but

she had not been able to fathom it; he had come to her looking pale and anxious sometimes of late, but always laughed her questions away. He could not bear that she should know the state of his mother's feeling towards her. He had wounded her in her most sensitive spot, her ambition for him. It was a source of great pain to Marlowe, for he loved this handsome, stately mother with a deep devotion.

Poor little Laurie had never felt comfortable in his mother's presence and instinctively shrank from the ceremonious visits of the elder woman; it was not hard therefore to deceive her in the matter and when Walter told her that he wished the engagement kept secret for awhile, and the wedding to be a private one, she thought it was out of consideration for her own circumstances, and gratefully acquiesced. He felt now that he had been precipitate in asking her to marry him on his graduation day; he should have won his mother first.

He loved Laurie too dearly, however, to risk wounding her by a suggestion of delay.

In the meantime, he guarded the affair from the knowledge of his classmates, who knew that he had always been friends with the major's pretty daughter but suspected nothing more. As for Laurie—a Southern girl keeps her love secrets well. He clung still to a gossamer thread of hope that his mother would consent to receive his wife kindly. He knew that she was prejudiced; that she visited the sins of the father upon the child; and there were moments when he fought against a dull feeling, almost of hatred of this man who had dragged his daughter from the position that should have been hers, and thus stood between him and his perfect happiness. It was this feeling that clouded his brow sometimes when he saw how tenderly devoted she was to the old father; but he could not breathe a word of it to her; she would have resented it deeply, he knew.

And thus the days passed on until Marlowe's graduation was but a few weeks off. The major had kissed his daughter more fondly than ever that morning, and started to town as usual; but when his foot was in the stirrup,

he stopped, and turning to her again patted her on the head, and taking her under the chin in a playful way, raised her face to his and looked long and lovingly into her eyes. Yes, it was a beautiful face, all dimpled with smiles now, for she was happy. Her father seemed more like his old self this morning, his depression seemed banished by magic.

True, he had not done his duty by his daughter, as the world said, this self-indulgent, easy-going man; he had squandered the fortune which should have been hers, but he was making for her sake to-day a sacrifice of his pride, and he alone knew what it cost him. To voluntarily sell an old negro long resident on the place, was an act which brought much hard criticism generally on the master.

He mounted, and old Senora was soon out of sight for she could travel well still. He turned at the last bend in the road and waved his hand to her; she watched him out of sight. In the last glimpse she had of him, he was looking back at her again. With all his delinquencies toward her, Laurie knew that her father had loved her well. It was this knowl-

edge that made her troubles, when they came, so much harder to bear. It was Saturday, and she knew Walter would come soon; her mind was full of little rose-colored plans for the future.

Presently she saw, first the dog, then the master, coming toward the rendezvous. That was the way he always came, sometimes with a Virgil sticking out of his pocket, sometimes with a gun over his shoulder, according to which proved at the time the best excuse for his ramble.

Walter proposed a picnic and a gipsy fire under the trees, and all went merrily until he innocently remarked that it was a sort of irregular sale-day in the town and as his father had gone in early, and his mother was visiting friends some miles away, he was free to spend his day with her. He was bent down in a comical effort to blow some sticks into a blaze. Struck by her sudden silence, he looked up at her, fanning the air wildly with his hat to get the smoke from before his eyes. She was standing pale and motionless; an agony of fear had seized her heart.

He sprang up in an instant and put his arm around her. "What is it, darling?" he asked anxiously. The look on her face alarmed him; she looked at him with an expression he had never seen on her face before. "Oh, Walter," she said solemnly, earnestly, laying one hand upon his arm, "I would not speak of this to any one but you; you have just reminded me that this is a sale-day in town, and I know my poor father will meet those terrible men who make him drink. It frightens me so, to think of his coming home late at night alone when he has been drinking. I have no one to go to but you—dear Walter, won't you go and stand by him and bring him home safely for my sake? Sometimes I have been able to keep him at home on these terrible sale-days, but I was so happy this time I did not remember and now I have let him go."

Here the great eyes filled with tears, and she clung to him pitifully. She looked so beautiful, so pure and sweet in her distress for this erring father, that all that was finest, all that was best, in this generous, but far

from perfect young man arose to meet her trust and fulfill it.

"I will go, dear," he said softly, drawing his arms closer about her; "but don't cry, Laurie; I can't bear that, indeed I can't."

"But oh, Walter, won't you go now, this moment? He is so good and yielding, they will make him drink again, I know it."

"I will go at once," he answered her proudly, a bright light flashing from his eyes, "and I will convince him that I am his friend for your sake, and one to whom he can entrust you. Don't worry about it any more, dear, for I am going to be your protector now. Look up, Laurie"—for she had hidden her face in shame and sorrow on his shoulder—"and smile at me, and say you trust me." She did smile—a little tremulous smile through her tears—and he folded her to his heart and kissed her passionately again and again. She had never seemed so dear to him as now, when she appealed to him for help.

"And now, darling, that is better," he said after a little, for he knew that to do any good he must be gone. "I'll be the oak and you

be the why, eh? Never fear; I will be with him, and it will be all right."

"Oh, Walter, if you will be his friend, I will never doubt that you love me."

"Then farewell, my lady fair, I go to do thy bidding," he said laughing, and dropped upon one knee kissing her hand to carry out his knight errant part. She was looking quite content again, and smiled upon him. Walter was so strong and manly—Walter loved her so truly! what had she to fear now?

"But don't you go anywhere, nor speak to any one else, nor do anything all day, but think about me, or I'll consider myself cheated," he called back to her. "Remember I only leave you to look after your father—our father, I mean." What would he not mean to please her?

"Leave Carlo to keep me company then," she said; "he often comes and spends the whole day with me when you are away—don't you, Carlo?" The dog, who was running from one to the other in doubt which way his duty lay, wagged his tail in complete acquiescence of anything, he did not care what.

"All right," said Walter, looking at Carlo and waving his hand slightly toward Laurie; meaning that she was in his charge until the master should return; "you can hold him as a hostage for the safe return of your father; he is the dearest thing I could leave you." He patted the beautiful creature on the head and went slowly from them. He returned homeward by the river-path and in less than a half hour was on horseback and on his way to C—.

He longed to do this little service for the girl he loved as ardently as any belted knight ever longed to display his lady's colors on the battle field.

She heard the distant sound of his horse's flying feet and now he was gone; just as the other had gone from her that day, with a kiss upon her forehead and fond words upon his lips.

CHAPTER VI

The public square in the town of C— presented a busy appearance on this Saturday afternoon in June, 1856.

The auction crier was standing on a platform and the sales of the day had just drawn to a close, when Marlowe rode up on horseback and halted on the outskirts of the crowd. Presuming that the object of his search would be found here, he dismounted and threw his bridle to a little black urchin who came up, with a flash of white teeth revealed in a broad grin at the prospect of a lucrative job, and entered the throng.

He was surprised to find the major not there, but an event had just then transpired which put his errand out of his mind for the moment. The epidemic of merriment showed that something unusual had occurred. Marlowe inquired of a townsman what the matter was, and as soon as the fellow could command

his voice he told him that "that — cuss Hank Staples had just bought a nigger," and lapsed into his paroxysms of laughter again. Just then he spied old Ben sitting disconsolately on a bench in the background shaking his head and talking to himself. It was he who had been sold to Hank Staples.

Marlowe could not understand it; after a few words with the auctioneer, he crossed over to the old darkey and laid a hand kindly upon his shoulder.

Uncle Ben raised his head, and a look of rapture came into his eyes when he saw who it was. Walter had come to be associated with his own folks in the old fellow's mind.

"Glory to Gawd! am dat 'you, Mas'r Walter?" he cried, and poured out the tale of his woe; he belonged "to the trash." Walter stood there and heard the whole pitiful story rehearsed; the desperate circumstances of the McNaughtons, this last resource to which they had been driven; it revealed a depth of necessity of which even he had been entirely ignorant. He was not surprised then that the major had absented himself from the scene.

He wished that he had been a little earlier, he would have bought the old negro at almost any price; how pleasant it would have been to tell Laurie that her old Ben would still be hers; for he knew how she would take his loss to heart. He was meditating a plan by which he might still treat with Mr. Staples and buy him back.

It would cost him something though to approach the despised upstart in an amiable way. The story had more than once reached his ears, that, presuming on his convivial relationship with the major, the parasite had dared lift his eyes to the major's daughter. To a certain side of Marshall McNaughton's nature Hank Staples appealed, but it was the worst side; and he would sooner have seen his little girl in her grave than that the fellow should ever say a familiar word to her. The idea simply never occurred to him that such a thing could be thought of; and Hank, in the meantime, had often spoken of her as his sweetheart. Nothing but his respect for her name had kept Marlowe's hand from the fellow's collar many times when that name had

been, in the most casual way, upon his lips.

The young man was standing beside Uncle Ben, meditating upon the affair, with anything but an amiable expression of face, when it was proposed that all should adjourn to the nearest bar-room, which proved to be "Hartley's."

"Hartley's" was a place of that type at which the two classes, the respectable commoner and the upper ten, made their nearest approach to affiliation. The chasm that divided them irrevocably, was narrower here than elsewhere, and although one seldom stepped from the one side to the other, they would often here shake hands across it.

It is obvious what an attraction such a place would possess for the younger men of the town; and it became, consequently the *bête noir* of the heads of the college of S—, which was situated in the suburbs and under whose walls assembled daily the scions of the best families in the state. The most strenuous rules were fixed against the students resorting thither at all, but these soon became Draconian laws, too hard to be fulfilled. So, the

president and the faculty, though they still considered "Hartley's" a thorn in the flesh, were forced to compromise the matter, and the older fellows knew that a Saturday evening spent in that convivial company would not be brought up against them, if their studies were not interfered with in consequence.

It was already getting toward evening when Marlowe entered; he had expected to meet his companions there in the evening, and he made it a point to avoid the appearance of his real errand. A brilliant company had already assembled, and there, surrounded by an admiring group, sat the major talking his noisiest. The young man, who watched him to-night with a new interest, thought that he had purposely worked himself into this state of feverish hilarity for a purpose; at any rate, he had fully embarked on a sea of glory in which he promised to be submerged before long; that was clear.

Marlowe greeted him casually and turned to where some friends were talking at an open window, and joined them; still keeping an

unobserved espionage upon him, however. To urge him to return home, would have been, at this juncture, like oil to the flames, he reflected, and so the only thing was, simply, to keep him in sight; in that way he could at least fulfill his promise to Laurie, and take him home safe—if not sober.

A reinforcement to the merry party soon arrived in a detachment of the college boys off for their Saturday holiday. They were all classmates of Marlowe's, and would graduate in a few weeks. It was understood that, in a way, this would be their last night's fun together; they would disperse after commencement to their homes in various parts of the Southern states.

They were the members of an organization connected with their college, similar, I suppose, to those that exist in all such institutions. The object being simply to have fun, as a relief from the routine of study; and banded together in order to accomplish that end more effectually.

It began in the same way as so many of those secret societies in the South, which in

war time, and in the "reconstruction" period, assumed so much importance in the eyes of the new government—namely, in a project to enjoy themselves, and, by a pledge of mutual support, to protect themselves, in some measure, from the chastisement of the faculty.

This particular clan had been organized several years before by a senior class, and handed down to each succeeding one, until it had grown to be a time-honored institution among the students. It was considered a mark of distinction for a stranger to be admitted; for the very essence of the thing depended upon a certain point of honor.

It was stipulated in the initiation formula that each member should pledge his most sacred honor to maintain a strict secrecy concerning anything that might occur when they were on any escapade together. If any member should be charged with a misdemeanor, he was to keep silent, whether innocent or guilty, and the others to do likewise, so as to baffle detection of the culprit. Nothing more was apprehended than a breach of college rules and the vengeance of the faculty.

Hitherto, the plan had been eminently successful, and it was the proud boast of the order that not a man had ever been induced, under any hard circumstances, to break the oath; one young fellow even suffered expulsion from college, when suspicion had fallen upon him, rather than speak on a particular occasion; and he was promptly canonized in the memory of the order.

For several days after the idea of this new club was conceived, the students had assumed a very promising attitude of studiousness over the open pages of their Horace and their Euclid, while they were racking their brains to find a name which would be both original and applicable. At last one night when lights were out, and the devotees of learning were supposed to be resting after their arduous tasks, one bright genius of the class announced that he "had it!" the clan should be called the "Order of the Mid-knights," a name significant of the chivalrous intentions of the order, and, also, of the hour at which they would generally hold their seances. This inspiration was hailed with as much enthusi-

asm as was compatible with the necessity of speaking under their breath, and the title was adopted.

The management of the college had made many efforts to disband the "M. K's," hoping as each succeeding class graduated and left the institution, it would be prevented from entering again; but all to no avail; the first thing they knew, the prize scholars of the class would be seen with the irrepressible insignia, the magical "M. K.", engraved on ring and stud.

One president, a Dr. Williams, had put his hand to the plow and endeavored to root out the evil; an evil the more formidable in that this oath of secrecy had grown through successive generations to be considered a sacred trust, a sort of pledge of honor, that any man would have considered it dire disgrace to violate; he threatened to expel from the college every young man refusing to abandon the order. The result was that almost the entire class announced their intention to leave. And so the worthy president found that his constituency would not back him up. He offered

his resignation in dignified umbrage; the trustees accepted it and the students remained. So the matter stood when the class of Walter Marlowe—the class of 1856—entered on its career, and never had the “M. K’s” promised to be more troublesome. Young Harry Napier—the son of that Judge Napier who now sat upon the bench of the supreme court of Georgia, was chosen chief for the year; and it was generally expected that the escapades of the class would reach their maximum under his reign. He and Marlowe were the best of friends, and it was pleasant to see the smile that lit up this charming young fellow’s face when he saw Walter, on entering Hartley’s with a half dozen other students and “M. K’s.”

Walter was the Beauclerc of the class, and they all were proud of him; he knew that Harry had been far more delighted when the honors of the year fell to his friend than if he had won them himself; in fact, he would have been surprised if any one had suspected him of wishing for them; said he did not go in for that sort of thing himself. This mad-

cap had always said that Marlowe was his better self—no one else had ever exercised so much influence over him. He was in his lightest, merriest mood this evening, and rallied Walter on his sober looks.

Pretty soon he discovered the major; and nothing ever pleased him quite so much as to listen to the witty stories and Mexican reminiscences that prevailed when the veteran was in the humor for them. The young fellow's inimitable laugh rang out every now and then, and Walter knew that both the orator and the listener were taking more wine than was customary among the students.

Soon, however, the scene changed; the major stopped short and muttered something under his breath; it sounded like a curse, but Walter could not hear the words. Then in walked Hank Staples—who had never been countenanced here but under Major McNaughton's wing,—with Uncle Ben at his heels. He evidently felt a right to make free among gentlemen because he had "bought a nigger."

The situation dawned upon the old slave's former master at once, and he sat staring at

the new-comers in a stupefied way, his brow contracted into a heavy frown, and the half emptied glass still grasped in his hand; but instantly on observing that he was attracting attention, he turned the conversation again into its former channel. He would not look in the old negro's direction, and he drank more heavily and more recklessly after that. The conversation soon became general, and he soon lost all sense of soreness in the general conviviality—apparently.

Mr. Hank Staples was a conspicuous member of that old branch of the population in the South so well known as the "po' white trash," a grade from which a man rarely, if ever, emerged; however, as I say, he had certain characteristics which gave him the *entree* to Hartley's, where, for the time being, he made more or less free with his acquaintances. Though ten years younger he had "fit long side o' Major McNaughton in the Mexican wah;" and somehow the major had always been his friend.

He was also something of a wag and told a good story. So, like the king's jester of "ye

olden time," he was privileged to say, virtually, whatever he pleased at the expense of any one present; no self-respecting man would resent it, unless the offense should be very marked. He gained a precarious living, one scarcely knew how, consequently, the surprise of all when he stepped up and bid a price for the old negro.

One of the company evidently had not digested the phenomenon yet, for, during a little lull in the cross-fire which was kept up between Mr. Staples and different members of the company, he broke in with, "Say, Hank! what the devil did you buy that old nigger for anyhow? He'll die on your hands before Christmas."

"Well, that's just what I bought him for," replied Hank with a chuckle.

"What!" exclaimed the chorus, "what does the fool mean by that?"

"Wall, it's jest this way, gentlemen," continued he, nothing abashed, "you see I haven't ever owned a nigger, and a man caint git inter good 'ciety till he has niggers o' some sort."

"That's so, Hank," said some one after the general outburst had subsided, "you struck the keynote then, but what'll you do when the old fellow dies—and you won't have either nigger or your money?"

"Wall, now, I reck'n that's jest what I'm layin' fur, gentlemen. I'm goin' to engage a place for him in the nigger graveyard here in town and have him buried by the Meth'dis chache when he dies; you've allus been a good Meth'dis hain't you, Unc' Ben?" he called over his shoulder.

"Yes, sah! I is, bress Gawd!" responded the old darkey, from his place in the rear of the party, the weary look on his face brightening a little at the thought of the posthumous honors that awaited him.

"Well, then, yer see," continued Mr. Staples, "when Unc' Ben dies, I'm agoin' to have him buried in town, and have the chache bells tolled fur his funeral; and when the people is all settin' 'roun' the squar' some un'll say, 'Hello! who's that gittin' buried? I hain't h'yearn o' nobody's dyin'.' Then some un else'll say in a kind o' off-hand way: 'Oh!

that's one o' Mr. Hank Staples' niggers,' so, you see, I'll be a durned aristocrat arter that." They all laughed heartily at this unique plan, Uncle Ben (who, it must be confessed, was cheering up under the influence of Bourbon and sugar,) heartiest of all. Harry Napier thought the joke deserved recognition, and they all had their glasses refilled. After that Mr. Staples—slave-holder, and aristocrat elect, began a sparring match with the major on cld Mexican days, and they prevailed upon him (the major)—who had a grand voice—to sing them a song. He sang with fine effect:

“ The guns had hushed their thunder,
The drums in silence lay;
When came the senorita,
The maid of Monterey,” etc.

During the singing, Uncle Ben was worked up into an ecstasy by the melody, and after swaying from side to side for a minute or two began also, singing a song in the same key, but with a widely different import from the other:

“ A charge to keep I has,
A God to glorify;
A nebber dyin' soul to sabe,
And fi' her fur de sky.”

The occurrence did not harmonize with the convivial scene. A dead silence followed the voice. Many felt the unconscious rebuke.

"Shut up, you old black Meth'dis!" cried Hank Staples, "or I'll knock yer two eyes inter one."

"I wish yer would," whined Uncle Ben, "an' knock my brains out too; fur I heap ruther be dead than ter b'long to you. I'se got a nebber dyin' soul as good as yourn an' I'se hones' an' squar'; an' I kin read de Bible, and say de Lawd's prar, an' dat's more'n you kin do, if you is my marster." Uncle Ben's heart prompted the thought; Bourbon and sugar spoke the words. Hank Staples struck him on the mouth, but if he had intended to repeat the blow he could not, for he was seized by Marlowe, and was on the floor in an instant.

"You dare to strike that old man, you low-lived cur!" he muttered between his clenched teeth, "and you will have to deal with me."

The young man's hand was at his throat, and his knee on the pigeon-breast of the "trash." It was the last touch to his long pent

animosity, and before he knew it, his temper took fire. He knew how the old negro was loved by Laurie, and that blow was too much.

Major McNaughton had, also, half arisen from his chair, his brow dark and threatening; but Marlowe had no sooner given way to his anger than he felt the imprudence of it; perhaps he felt a little ashamed to attack anything so low and mean; and he thought also that, with all his brutality, the fellow had once done a great service to Laurie's father, and was befriended by him.

"What shall I do with him, gentlemen?" he said, "you all saw that dastardly act; he isn't worth killing."

"Git up," said the major curtly; and, strangely enough, Marlowe arose, and spurning the prostrate figure slightly with his foot, let him go.

"Gentlemen," said the young fellow, turning to the others, "you all know that my honored father is a preacher of the gospel, and has spent his life in the service of the church; the hymn that old man began to sing was always a favorite of his, and no one shall in-

sult that old negro or pour contempt on that hymn, unless he first puts me beyond the power of hearing him."

"You are right," several voices said.

The major looked silently on while the young fellow was speaking. "Walter," he said, "come here; you see that old man; he has not many years to live, maybe, but take him yourself—your father won't object to anything you do, he is a good man and a holy one—and let him spend his last years in peace."

"I will do that gladly," responded Marlowe, "I was going to propose it myself."

The plan was applauded by all. "That will suit all round," said some one.

"Wall, it won't suit me," said Hank Staples, "fur I hain't agoin' to sell him."

"Yes, you will!" thundered the major. "Yes, you will," echoed the crowd. "And if you don't agree," continued the major, incensed at last against his parasite, "you'll never set foot in my house agin, an' I'm the only friend you've got in the world, you know that d— well."

"You've got your title to aristocracy, you idiot!" suggested some one, "now's your chance to get your money back besides."

This argument seemed to find a lodgment in his alleged mind, or, perhaps, he was not willing to break with Laurie's father, and so, after a little, he gave a half reluctant acquiescence to the plan.

"How do you like the idea, Uncle Ben?" asked Harry Napier, who was chosen, on the strength of being the judge's son, to preside over the sale.

"Amen! Amen! I likes it powerful;" responded Ben; "Mas'r Walter nex' 'ting to my own folks, an' I likes to git a chance to lib wid de good ole doctor."

"Then," said Napier laughing, "Uncle Ben must stand upon the bench over there and knock himself down to the highest bidder. Never mind, Mr. Staples," he continued, seeing the rather crestfallen look of the "trash," "we will run up the bids until Marlowe pays you a good price for your property." His fun-loving spirit hailed the sport of the thing, but he was too kind at heart to willingly see any

creature suffer for it. His faults—and they were many—were the faults of a rash temper, never deliberate cruelty. Under all his wild ways he had a heart that would not take pleasure in the suffering of anything that lived.

Uncle Ben took his stand on the bench, highly amused, but equal to the occasion. "Heah I stan', gentlemen," he began; "goin,' goin,' goin,' to de highest bidder; how much is I offered fur dis good 'telligent nigger? He's hones' an' squar' an' he's got a heap o'sense, an' he'll make a good han' to ten' to de do', an' carry 'roun' passels, an' mebbe, sometime, when dey ain't got nobody else he kin preach to de niggers 'bout de dangers ob de hen-roos', an' de watermillion patch; how much is I offered fur dis good valuable nigger?"

Marlowe bid the price Staples had paid previously.

"Gone!" said Uncle Ben, dismounting, "de nigger is yourn."

"Hold on," said young Napier, the judge, "that isn't legal and just to the owner; you can't knock yourself down on one bid; you must wait for the second, at least."

"How much is I offered fur dis fine ole nigger?" continued that individual, getting just a little anxious now as to his fate.

Some one else made a bid for the fun of the thing, and Marlowe made a still higher one.

"Is dat s'ficient?" inquired Uncle Ben.

"Yes," explained Napier, "but don't close the sale too quick, give the buyers a chance."

"All right," said Uncle Ben, "but if de right pusson don't bid de highes' price dis auction ain't gwine ter close till to-morrer mornin'."

There were no more bids, and he announced:

"I'm goin,' goin,' gone to Mr. Marlowe fur de highes' bid, and cheap at half de money." Uncle Ben was henceforth "one o' dem stuck up Marlowe niggers," whom Aunt Viney couldn't get along with "nohow."

CHAPTER VII

The hours wore on, and the twilight deepened into night—still the revelry continued.

Uncle Ben had been seated in a farmer's wagon, and consigned to the Rev. Duncan Marlowe without any written explanation; leaving him to make the best terms he could with the kind-hearted clergyman.

The students of every college have their peculiar way of having fun. Those of the S—college, the "M. K's," found their highest enjoyment in forming themselves into a marauding party and turning the town topsy-turvy on Saturday nights, so that the long-suffering citizens, on the morrow, would wonder if an earthquake had visited the place during the night or set them to doubting that they, themselves, were in a rational state of mind.

Walter Marlowe astounded them all this

night by refusing to go with them, as he wished to return home with the major; but it was voted that the major should join the party. Then came a difficulty; the major, in his capricious mood, insisted that Hank Staples should go wherever he went; so the situation was, plainly, to either admit him or lose the major, and, consequently, Marlowe; so they chose the former course. Harry Napier insisted that both the new-comers should take the oath of the "M. K's."

He read it over and they subscribed to it, the oath referring to the one night only; it did not admit them into the order at all; that required an elaborate formula. This was the oath:

"In the name of heaven, and in the presence of you my companions, I do solemnly swear that I will never reveal the secrets of this night's work so long as I shall live, so help me God!"

And these fatal words they repeated because, in their blindness, they loved the exaggeration—the solemn tone of them;—idle young fellows who had nothing else to do.

The major, who was wildly hilarious when his changeable mood shifted in that direction, said he considered having fun the inalienable right of all young men at college.

"I remember," said the major, "about ten years ago, when the Jinkins boys was in the 'M. K's.' One of 'em is the smartest lawyer in the state now, and stands a good chance of bein' governor; Clodious Jinkins—'Clod,' as they used to call him—was head o'the clan just as you are now, Mr. Napier. Well, one Saturday night jest before commencement—like it is now—them boys went out to have a good time, and, glory! didn't they make this old town lively, for a few days! Sunday mornin' come, and the folks all got up and commenced to git ready for church. The parson, who had been pretty hard on the S—boys in his sermon, had on his best clothes and was jest washed and shaved and started out for a mornin' walk; when he lifted the latch, his hands was stuck fast with tar, ha! ha! and there wasn't no soap in his house that could take it off before church time. Nearly all the sign-boards in town was turned

upside down; the front steps of the hotel was oiled so slick that everybody that came out set down before they got invited to, and went to the ground like boys on a cellar door. On the door of the old jail up there was stickin' the placard from the new hotel sayin' 'handsome new lodgin's fitted up for guests, and all the delicacies of the season without extra charge.'

"The old president had just been removed because he was too strict with the boys, though he didn't do nuthin' but enforce the rules as he found 'em; but, you see, it wouldn't do to let the institution git unpopular; so they put another man in his place; and the Saturday which I was speakin' about, the boys burned him in effigy—so to speak. In the middle of the public square, there is where they made his grave; and Sunday mornin' as the folks went to church, they saw a fresh mound o' earth and a white painted board at the head of it on which was wrote the followin':

"Sacred to the memory of
President Williams,
who was killed by the accidental discharge of
his duty.

“That struck me as bein’ pretty funny, as well as havin’ a kind of rebuke to the trustees down in the heart of it. Well, I tell you they didn’t leave no stone unturned to find out the feller what wrote that. They fell on one young man and thought by threatenin’ to expel him and disgrace him, they’d make him speak, and tell who’d done it; but they didn’t and the poor fellow was turned out in a shameful way. ’Twas pretty hard on him, ’specially as most people thought ’twant him ’tall; but that was better than breakin’ that oath what’s been kept by so many men; for I reckon a feller wouldn’t hardly hold up his head here in C—if he’d broke the oath of the ‘M. K’s,’—you know how it is yourselves; it’s been kept so long that it’s got to be a sort of feelin’ amongst you that it must be kep’ anyhow, eh?

“Well, that mornin’ I jes’ went on, laughin’ fit to kill myself, when I spied the head of ‘Mose,’ my old mule, stickin’ out o’ the second story winder o’ the court-house. He was blind, most, and would go anywhere they led him, an’ there he was that peaceful Sun-

day mornin' stickin' his head out o' the window, all ring-streaked and striped, from his head to his tail, like unto a zebry in the circus. That was the trick they played on me; but I didn't git mad, no, not a whit; I believe in the boys havin' fun."

It was agreed by the students that the major was a trump; and they set their wits to work to devise some mischief to eclipse, if possible, even the record of the Jinkenses.

The major said: "I know you boys don't mean no harm, and if anybody interferes with you jest refer 'em to us, eh, Hank?"

"Thar's whar you are solid, maje," replied Mr. Staples; "we stuck together at 'Cherry Gordy,' an' 'Buner Vistir,' and I reckon we kin stick to the boys through a little frolic like this."

Some one proposed, as they were leaving Hartley's, to drink Mr. Staples' health after such a chivalrous speech; but Hank, forgetting his caution in his delight at being so well into the major's good graces again, said: "No, gentlemen, ef you want to honor me, drink to Laurie McNaughton, the gal what I love best."

And again, for the second time that night, Marlowe was upon him. He spoke in an undertone so that only a few heard him. "You impertinent scoundrel!" he said, (trembling in the effort to speak low and avoid attracting the general attention) "if you speak her name in my presence again, I'll whip you until you are half dead."

"Good for you, Hank!" said the major, who alone understood it all; "you're gettin' too d— impudent lately; keep in your place hereafter and don't you dare to say them words again—d'ye hear?"

Then the marauders started on their rounds, the major having many a laugh at the ludicrous things they did; but Hank Staples stood aside, sullenly muttering between his teeth: "Go ahead and have your fun now, yer stuck-up swells! my turn'll come one o' these days."

They had fun to their hearts' content; but as the town clock stuck two, the major suddenly grew tired of it all, and said he was going home; and Walter could not be dissuaded from his purpose to accompany him. He had arrived too late to prevent the degrada-

tion that Laurie had feared; but he would do all he could—he would at least see that he returned to his home in safety. So the whole party agreed to escort them also. This arranged, they started on their journey in great glee; there were, besides Major McNaughton and Hank Staples, six of the students; all the five were to graduate with Marlowe in a few weeks.

They answered, at roll call, to the names of Arthur Dalton, Ernest Caldwell, Randolph King, Lewis Holbrook, Walter Marlowe and Harry Napier. With the exception of Staples, they were all well mounted. The old Senora, wonderful, for one of her great age, showed to no disadvantage among the array of magnificent animals, but held her own nobly. Harry Napier rode his famous coal-black mare.

Harry Napier the peerless! How long and how well the people remembered him—erect, and lithe of limb—they said he had the darkest blue eyes they ever saw, and hair of a rich chestnut brown, thrown back from his forehead and falling in heavy clusters about his

neck. He was a stranger to fear, malice and meanness, and without an enemy in the world. Yet he was the outlaw of the neighborhood. They said, too, that they had seen him do such deeds of foolhardiness, and come through them, that they had come almost to think him invincible to harm.

His father, the judge, who, in his heart, every one knew idolized the boy, often sentenced him to be locked up over night for some disturbance of the peace; but it always so happened that no constable could be found able to execute the order. There was not one of them who would not have abused his office, to some extent, for love of the wild, but generous-hearted young fellow. He was the leading spirit to-night.

Marlowe, noticing him carefully, thought he had taken more wine than usual; in fact Marlowe himself was the only one in the party exempt from the same charge. He tried to conceal from the major that he was acting according to a promise made to Laurie; he knew the father well enough to feel sure that he would resent the idea of surveillance; but

still he kept close to him. The major would break out into a most hilarious manner occasionally, but Marlowe, who watched him closely also, could not escape the impression that the greater part of it was forced; he was trying to drown unpleasant thoughts, evidently, but the experiences of the day had left a sore spot very near the surface, and woe to the hand that should touch it!

Their way lay across a small river which, at certain places, could be safely forded. Old "Senora," the mare, had crossed it and carried her master safely over, a thousand times; but there were certain inequalities in the bed of the river which were to be carefully avoided and, at a little distance from the ford, there were several deep holes, supposed to be too well known to require a mark. The old mare herself, would have known how to pick her way safely across, but she had never crossed it in such company before.

The mad cavalcade dashed in without a moment's hesitation, Marlowe riding close to the major,—and in a few minutes they were climbing the bank on the other side—all but

two. Senora had gotten into the treacherous pitfalls and lost her footing; she fell, precipitating her rider into the water. Marlowe shouted to the others to stop, and in a very few minutes they got the major ashore, thoroughly soaked, thoroughly angry, and swearing like a trooper for his horse. But the faithful creature was fast getting beyond help. Below the ford there was a fall in the river, and being badly hurt and unable to swim she went swiftly towards it.

The night was dark, and her master dazed and maddened by the brandy he had drunk.

"Where is my horse?" he shouted. "Bring me my horse, you scoundrels!" A horrible fear enraged him.

"Senora, my girl!" he called to her, and started towards the ford again. The mare, now near the fall, and plunging helplessly, answered him in a wild shrieking neigh. Have you ever heard the cry of a drowning horse? Those who have, pray that they may never hear it again. Her master realized that she was going to her death; with a deep curse, he staggered forward in a mad impulse to

save her. This would have been suicide; few swimmers, in best condition, could have withstood the strong current just above the fall.

Marlowe had done his best; two strong arms went round the major's waist and held him back. He struggled desperately to loosen the grasp, now thoroughly angry, but it was firm as iron. His idolized horse—his darling Senora—was dying before his eyes, and he could not stir to her rescue. In the brief instant in which he heard her terrible neighing, and stood there, pinioned, past scenes arose before his eyes with the swiftness of thought—the bloody battles of Mexico through which the gallant mare had borne him, answering like a child to each touch, each word; all the thrilling scenes of danger when her fleet limbs had brought him with a speed like the wind; now the noble beauty—next to Laurie, the pride of his heart—was struggling in the dark water, and he stood there helpless.

"Let me go!" he shouted once more, with a terrible oath, but the others gathered around him and held him back; they knew it would be death to him if they let him go.

Then, as their eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness down the stream, they saw her, with a convulsive effort to gain a footing, go over the rocks.

That was the end; the death scream, as the waters swept her over, struck horror to the heart of every man on the bank. When her master saw that she was gone he turned upon the men who had held him, with the rage of a tiger in his motions.

"See, you have killed her!" he shouted. "You scoundrels! now let me go!" He was mad with conflicting emotions; in a moment he had wrenched himself free, and struck the young man who had held him heavily across the face with the riding-whip which he still held in his hand. The movement was so unexpected that before they could disarm him of the whip he had dealt several stinging, lacerating blows with it and the insult was answered. A stiletto-like blade flashed in the air, and, though many arms were interposed, they were too late to arrest it; the blade was buried in the major's breast, and the gallant horse and her once dashing rider went to their death together, after all.

CHAPTER VIII

The wreck of a late moon arose above the river bank, and looked upon the white face of Marshall McNaughton as he lay, tranquil and composed, under the sky of the summer night, as though a loving hand had arranged the disheveled garments for peaceful burial. None, looking at the quiet face alone, would have thought of violence and murder; death had done its greatest work here, as so often happens to the face that does not fear it.

It was again the face of the gallant soldier of Cerro Gordo, lying upon the cool earth with a dark wound beneath the folded hands, as he had dreamed that he might lie in death upon some battle plain under the sky of old Mexico. Yet they had called it a kind fate that spared the young soldier on the field of honor! Nature had made him for a soldier; death became him better than life. This

deadly fairness brought out a wonderful likeness between this and another face just beyond the river and up through the grove, not a mile from the fatal spot. The same moonlight fell upon them, the same night breeze kissed them, first one and then the other as it wandered to and fro, fragrant with the odors of the summer night; both unconscious—both asleep.

Laurie had watched for her father through the long afternoon, sitting by the bend where she could see him first, Carlo's head resting on her knee; she had no anxiety about him to-day; was not Walter with him?

"We can always trust Walter, can't we, Carlo?" This hitherto neglected companion gave a joyous bark in answer to the beloved name. He took his seat beside her, remembering his master's charge. He laid his head in her lap and prepared for a doze, keeping the corner of one eye open, however, in order to be up with any stray farmer's dog that might come along, and receiving Laurie's caresses as philosophically as though he had known they were meant for some one else.

This watch continued until the sun got very low in the west; and she began then to feel a keen disappointment. She had thought Walter would bring him earlier this time.

"But they will come, Carlo—they will come," she kept saying over and over. Carlo thought they would. She said to herself, "In a few moments more the sun will be behind that hill; by that time they will come, I know they will; we will wait that long and then—go in."

Just as the reddening sun touched the summit, she heard the long expected sound of horse's feet; she stood behind the trees by the bend with her hand on Carlo's collar, and waited; but her cheek blanched to a deathly whiteness when the sound passed by, along the main road, and she heard the strange voices of the horsemen.

"Must have been a fine old place in its day," said one.

"Yes," replied the other voice, "there wasn't a finer place in the state twenty year ago but it's been a runnin' down pretty fast here lately. Reck'n things was at a pretty low

ebb when he put up that old nigger for sale."

"Yes, he peared moughty cut up 'bout it; well, I reck'n—" They passed out of hearing, two neighboring farmers on their way home from the sale.

The girl put a little hand on her heart in a pathetic gesture of pain; she thought at first they were talking of her own father; but the reference to the selling of a negro, that relieved her mind; of course they were talking of some other family. But it was getting late and she must go. Still no sign of horse or rider on the now darkening road.

"Come, Carlo," she said; and with the deepest sigh her young lips had ever yet breathed, she abandoned the watch, and went, with slow and heavy steps, towards the house; trying, oh, so hard! not to doubt her lover. Supper was a pretense. "Why, Honey, what make you take on so?" old Viney asked, looking at the pale face ruefully, her arms akimbo. "Dis ain't de fust time what yer pa did'n come home."

Poor little girl! she was trying to be brave, but she had been so disappointed; the tears

were very near the surface, and at the first touch of sympathy they overflowed. "Oh, mammy!" she whispered, as she clung round the old nurse's neck, lest the spirits of the air should hear her blame him, "but Walter promised he would bring him to me; I wish Uncle Ben were here—where is he?"

"Nebber min', Honey—nebber min';" said the old creature, trying to reassure her, though her own heart was very heavy. She knew that Uncle Ben would come no more in the old way. "My 'pinion is," she began after a little, as she was clearing away the untasted supper, "dat Mas'r Walter done struck up wid dem college chaps o' hisen, and deys gone off on some o' dere sky-larkin'—"

"Oh, mammy!"

"Nebber min', Honey; I knows all 'bout it; I tink Mas'r Walter mighty fine gem'man too, but ef you gits a husband what don' git drunk 'cepin' on Sat'days you's gwine ter be powerful lucky—you is."

But Laurie refused to take this novel consolation. She sat by an open window and watched the road until the twilight deepened

into night; still they did not come, and still she did not stir. The old nurse tried all her powers of intimidation first, of persuasion afterwards, but Laurie shook her head, too full to speak, and would not go.

So Aunt Viney sat down at last to share her watch, and in a few minutes, after the toils of the day, was sleeping heavily in her corner. The window at which Laurie sat was a wide, low one, opening to the east. One arm was round the huge dog's neck, and her tear-stained cheek was laid upon the other, which rested on the window-sill. The hours wore on and the sighs which broke poor Carlo's heart gradually ceased. The young eyes, unused to watching and to grief, slowly closed, and Laurie, thinking only that her lover had forgotten his promise, had cried herself to sleep.

She was sleeping thus, her head upon the folded white arm, when the moon rose, first upon the major's dead face by the river's brink, and touched the girl's bent head with its waning light; it shone into the eyes of the only waking watcher there, old Carlo—who,

in the prescience of his great race, foresaw misfortune, and would not quit his place by Laurie's side.

He sat there through the long hours of night, his nose pointed upward to the moon, and his silken ears falling back, while a look of human wistfulness shone through his eyes. The only sign of restlessness he betrayed was that now and then he would take one white-mittened paw from the girl's knee and put up the other; and there he kept his charge, faithful where the master had failed—wakeful while the daughter slept. At length the fair summer dawn broke in the east; and still Laurie slept the sleep of youth.

Old Viney woke with the first streak of light and went on tiptoe to another room, brought a light shawl, and, with love's gentle touch, laid it around her darling's shoulders, and went softly out to her tasks. She patted Carlo on the head and left them together. The light slowly broadened and brightened on the scene, and the peaceful Sabbath morning had begun its reign upon the earth.

Aunt Viney went about her task of getting

breakfast, her mind far from being in harmony with the serenity of the new day. She was oppressed with a persistent foreboding; she had energetically characterized herself "an ole black fool" many times, but, sing as she would, the feeling would not be gone.

She had certainly succeeded in working herself into a very hysterical state, for when she looked up from blowing the smoldering chunks into a blaze, and saw the familiar face of Uncle Ben looking silently in through the kitchen window, she uttered an ear-piercing shriek and dropped her head between her knees in true African fashion. When he spoke in his earthly voice, however, and convinced her there was nothing supernatural about the apparition, she arose and went about her work just as though nothing had happened.

"Come in, Unc' Ben," she said, "an' tell somebody whar you's come from. 'Fore Gawd! What you want ter be skeerin' folks outen dere min's fur, lookin'in dat kin o' quiet like, as if you jes' drop from de sky or som-ers?"

"Well, fur de Lawd's sake, Sis' Viney, you

don' mean ter tell me yer ain't h'yearn nuffin 'bout it?" replied the visitor, as he entered (with a newly acquired dignity, Aunt Vieny thought,) placed his hat and stick on the floor, and parting the tails of a long black coat, also newly acquired, took his seat on the most available stool. Aunt Viney, without appearing to take much notice, was watching him keenly out of the corner of her eyes.

"Ain't you dun h'yearn nuffin'bout my bein' sol' to dat Hank Staples?" he continued. That brought her around.

"What!" she screamed, facing about and staring at the speaker; and, with open eyes and mouth, and hands on her hips, she drank in the rest of the story.

If there was anything the old fellow really loved, it was an audience, and a good story with which to regale it. He made the most of this melancholy occasion, and went on to give Aunt Viney, in the main, a pretty correct account of the day's proceedings, after what flourish his nature would; he was worked up to such a state of excitement during the recital of his experiences that he lost sight, for

the time being, of his present errand. He came back to it with a shock of recollection.

"But see yere, Sis' Viney," he began in a changed tone, "what you tink when I tells you Mas'r Walter ain't dun been home all night? I h'yeard the ole gem'man git up more'n wunst in de night and go tiptoein' to his room ter see ef he wuz dere. I had a pallet down in de study for dat night, an' I could'n sleep nuther, kase I got to tinkin' 'bout all de strange circumstancials what's been happenin' lately, and so I h'yeard him shet de do' wid a awful sigh an' go back to his own room. I don' b'leive he slep' none 'tall all de night long, fur he wuz up walkin' in de gyardin' jes' arter daylight, but he nebber let on, an' when he seed me, he jes'sez to me, smilin' at me kin' o' quiet like over his specs, 'Well, Unc' Ben, don' you want ter go over ter see how yer folks is gittin' 'long at de ole place dis mornin'?' I 'lowed as how I'd be powerful glad to go, an' when I was goin' out de gate, he sez, kin' o' offhand-like—"Say, Unc' Ben, you kin jes' ask 'em ef Mr. Walter wuz wid de major when he kum home las' night."

"Bress your heart, chile! you caint find out nuffin here; we ain't seed nary a one ob 'em sence yistiddy," interrupted Aunt Viney.

"My Savior 'bove! you don' say so!" cried the astounded visitor. "Well, I seed yestiddy Mas'r Walter had his eye on de major all day, an' I 'lowed as how he dun fetch him home, an' stay yere all night, to sort o' take keer of him like; an' I reckon de ole doctor he kinder countin' on dat too. De Lawd know, Sis' Viney, dat wil' boy give his poor ole fader heap o' trouble; I hope he sorter settle down when he mah'y Honey, ef it warn't fur nuffin but jes' de ole man's sake, he dat proud of him."

"Umph!" responded Viney, "I tink he better settle down some fur Honey' sake;" she felt a suspicion that Unc' Ben was already transferring his interest to the Marlowes, and she resented it.

It was still very early when Uncle Ben arose to return from his fruitless errand. He did not relish the thought of going back without news; it mortified his self-importance in the first place, and besides he felt that there

was some mystery on hand, and that it threatened two beings whom he held dearer than anything else on earth, unless it might be the old Senora. He loved Laurie, but he worshiped the other three. He put on his hat, took up his stick, and told Aunt Viney that he would go through the town, and return home that way, in hopes that he might hear something of the absentees.

He decided to call at young Napier's house, for he knew the young fellows were great chums, and Walter often spent the night with him; the coincidence of the major's non-appearance made it a little improbable that time, but still he would try it. He would "jes drap in, an' fin' out 'dout askin' ef Harry wuz home."

All this had occurred in a short half hour after Aunt Viney had left Laurie asleep at her post, and the girl did not see Uncle Ben go down the walk towards the front gate. She slept on, oblivious of her troubles; a happy smile played around her lips. In the light of her golden dream, it was her wedding-day; Walter was there, looking so grand and hand-

some, and he was telling her that she had never looked so pretty.

There was Aunt Viney, happy and officious around her darling, Uncle Ben in his Sunday coat—and best of all, there was her dear father shaking hands with Walter, and kissing her forehead in the old fond way. The odor of cape jessamines was in the air, and the little wedding procession was just starting from the front porch, when a loud sound startled her from her sleep.

She sprang up in a bewildered way, and Carlo, uttering terrific sounds, between a bark and a howl, leapt through the open window. She looked down the avenue, and saw a confused group of men approaching, their forms tinged red with the morning sun.

As they came nearer, she saw that they carried a man on their rough litter of branches, and that it was her father. Uncle Ben walked at the head. They brought him slowly—slowly—up the wide steps, in through the doorway, and into the very room, and laid him down before her. Still she did not move or speak; she stood against the window, her

face as white as the wall behind her, one hand stretched out, palm forward, in a convulsive effort to shut out the sight—transfixed with horror.

The old negro fell on his knees by his dead master and rocked himself backward and forward with a low crying sound.

Aunt Viney heard the strange voices and came in to see that sight, Laurie standing still in the same spot gazing tearless and speechless on the floor where they had reverently laid him down. The look on her face frightened the old nurse, and she tried to get her from the room. She would not hear them, but stood, wide-eyed and ghastly, almost, as the face before her.

They were rough, kindly men, some of them negroes, and they were afraid of the look in the girl's face more than of the dead one before them. One of them, not knowing what else to do or say, went out and brought in a packet which they had found together with the dead man's hat and whip a little way from the body. They undid it before her.

There was the delicate snowy fabric of a

woman's dress—gossamer laces, and all the fair belongings of a wedding robe. It was the white dress he had promised her, and now—he had brought it.

It saved her; this sight struck home through the trance of terror that enveloped her, and with a low cry, she threw herself upon the still form, kissing the beloved hands and weeping bitterly.

Old Viney, who could never bear before to see her darling's tears, rejoiced to see them now.

CHAPTER IX

The McNaughton place was several miles from town, and it was some time before the tragic news reached C—. The two old slaves and the orphaned child were left for awhile undisturbed with their grief. The time went by but they did not count it. At last it occurred to them that some one must be told.

The men whom Uncle Ben had summoned to help him bear his master's body home were ignorant farm-hands and negroes, who knew this was murder and were afraid to go to the proper authorities and make it known, lest that act should implicate them in it, and so went quietly to their homes. Uncle Ben's first impulse was to go to Dr. Marlowe.

But he had been away longer than he thought, and when he reached the Marlowe house, he found that the doctor had been gone some time to the church connected with the college, where he preached. Mrs. Marlowe

was from home and her husband had gone alone. His heart was heavy on account of his son's prolonged absence, and he felt that it boded some unknown evil. But his distress of mind did not hinder his work; no earthly consideration had ever induced him to neglect his religious duties; he had enlisted under Christ's banner, knowing well that there was no discharge in that war, and he had never faltered or hung back.

The farmers of the neighborhood, as well as those connected with the college, attended service at the doctor's church, and were already grouped about the open door. A pleasant smile lit up the faces as the throng parted to let the good pastor enter. He was more grave this morning than was his wont, but he stopped and greeted them all kindly. Judge Napier stood in the vestibule talking with Dr. McKenzie, the president of the college.

They were chatting upon the topics of the day as their custom was, before service began. The judge congratulated the doctor upon the good record of his son, and his approaching

graduation. The doctor returned the sentiment with regard to young Napier.

"Well," said the judge, "Harry is a wild fellow, but I believe his record is pretty good so far as studies go. I hope after he gets his diploma, he will settle down to the law and lead a more quiet life. He was off last night, on some mischief, I've no doubt."

"My son was also absent from home last night," said Dr. Marlowe.

"Is that so? I left the young men together in town yesterday afternoon."

"Who was with them?" inquired the president of the college, who had been an attentive listener.

"O, there was some half dozen of them," replied the judge; "there was young Marlowe, Holbrook, Harry, Randolph King and others—there was a young fellow with them—a student of yours here but I don't know his name."

"Probably Ernest Caldwell," said the president; "some of these young men board in my house and are absent this morning without excuse. I fear, gentlemen, that something has gone wrong."

However, the service proceeded as usual; some of the congregation, indeed, remarked that the pastor did not preach with his wonted spirit, and that the old president looked grave and anxious; though none, excepting the preacher, who faced the door, saw the frosted head of old Uncle Ben approach the door every now and then and peer anxiously in.

In his apprehensive state of mind, the pastor readily connected the negro's strange action with his son's absence, and once, for the first time in his experience, he almost lost the thread of his discourse. He nerved himself, however, and went on to the end, and delivered the benediction in his clear, solemn voice and dismissed the people.

Then he walked down the aisle to where Uncle Ben was waiting for him. The old fellow had gone to the door every time, intending to signal the doctor to come out to him, for he felt that this matter could not wait; but a superstitious fear checked him, and he would go out again, endeavoring to wait, sitting on a tombstone, until the service was over. He beckoned the minister aside and spoke in an excited undertone.

They saw the doctor throw up his hand to his head, and lean against a pillar for support. In a moment the awful story had spread through the crowd and the excitement was intense.

Uncle Ben implored the doctor to go with him, and burying his own anxiety in his heart, (for he could not fail to associate the murder with the absence of the students) he hastened to the house of death.

Poor Laurie listened to him when he laid his hand upon her head and spoke to her in his kind, authoritative voice, and turned to him in piteous dependency.

He stayed there through the terrible day and saved her from many a harrowing ordeal. He bade the old nurse take her to her room and keep her there until the coroner had been summoned and finished his ghastly work.

The verdict was murder and not suicide, as some had vaguely hoped it might be.

The minister heard, the load on his heart growing heavier and heavier.

Sympathetic friends filled the house, and the girl had no need of him further so he went home late in the afternoon.

Old Ben saw him go down the avenue alone in the western light, a solitary, bent figure walking slowly with his hands clasped behind him, in deep thought, and followed him. The house was full of strangers, there seemed nothing he could do. The old master was forever beyond his help, he resolved to stand by the new one. They were sitting together in the study when the clock struck twelve that night; the doctor leaning, still, with his head upon his hands, his eyes upon the open pages of his Bible, his thoughts with his absent boy.

“Could he be implicated in that ghastly crime, his boy, his Benjamin?” was the refrain of their monotonous query. And yet it looked so dark against them all.

To Dr. Marlowe, the old negro with his many years of service, and his crown of snow, was indeed a “nebber dyin’ soul,” committed to his care. He readily believed the old fellow’s story of the scene in town yesterday, which he had left too early to witness himself, and he was glad his son had acted in that matter as he did. Knowing Uncle Ben’s religious tendencies, he gave him an old suit of

broadcloth of clerical cut, and installed him at once as door-keeper—not indeed in the house of the Lord, but of one of his saintliest vicegerents.

“Ben,” said the doctor at last, rising with a deep sigh, “I must try to get some rest for to-morrow; you can remain here, if you are willing, a little longer and keep the light burning. Maybe the boy will come before morning. If you fall asleep it doesn’t matter, but don’t let the light go out; you know how it stands with the boy, and if he returns and finds the house in darkness it may seem a rebuke to him, and we may never see him again.”

“Yas, Mas’r Duncan,” replied the old darkey, “I’ll set up an’ wait fur de dear boy.”

There was a holy hush in the atmosphere of the study with the pictures of saints and patriarchs looking benignly from the walls; the sacred books standing on their shelves, and the huge Bible spread open upon the table. And this was to be Uncle Ben’s home for the remainder of his life! The sacred calm of it fell upon him. He had been through so much that day that he could not fully realize it all.

The man whom he had loved and served was dead, a terrible fulfillment of what they had lived in dread of so long. He had found the old Senora's body below the rocks during the day and made her a grave with reverent hands in a quiet field where the sweet clover, instead of the wild pampas grasses of the South would wave over her; and the feeling, half of sorrow, half of rest, came over him, that his work was done. If only the boy would come, —surely, after the horror, it would all be well again.

An hour later he arose, trimmed the lamp afresh, and placed it nearer to the window, singing softly to himself a verse of one of his old Methodist hymns.

“ And while de lamp hol's out to burn
De viles' sinner may return.”

Then he timidly approached the big Bible and turned the pages quietly, looking at the pictures over his spectacles. There was no sound, but presently he raised his eyes and saw a face peering in through the window, and a beckoning finger called him to the door; the face was ghostly and pale as a

phantom of the night, but he knew it; he went to the door and softly opened it.

"For God's sake, Uncle Ben, speak low," the voice said, "and do not let my father know that I am here. Come with me."

They went together down a path to where Walter Marlowe's companions were waiting under the shadow of a clump of pines.

"Mas'r Walter, whar's you bin so long? Yo' pa frettin' awful kase you did'n come home," Ben whispered as he tried to keep up with the young man's impatient strides.

Marlowe halted when he rejoined his friends and turned to the old man. "Uncle Ben," he said, "I was your friend when you were in trouble, be my friend now, and I will give you your freedom."

"Bress your soul, Mas'r Walter, I don' want no more freedom dan I's got in de good doctor's house, but I'd lay down my life dis minit if it would help you outen any trouble; 'deed I would."

"Then tell me all you know of Major McNaughton."

"Dead!" cried the negro, raising both hands;

"dead! done murdered! I found him lyin' dar dead and stiff by de riber dis mornin'. My poor marster done killed, Mas'r Walter, an' everbody sayin' as how some o' you young men took an 'done it. An' Honey, she don' do nuffin but jes' cry 'bout him all day, an' yo' pa, he almos' 'stracted kase you did'n come home and clar yourself. I knowed it warn't you, Mas'r Walter, I know it warn't, but I tank Gawd you's back to tell 'em so. Yo' pa he could'n say nuffin kase de folks all say, why dem young fellows all git away fur, ef dey aint guilty? But now yo's cum back an' you kin tell 'em yo' didn' do it. Tank Gawd! Tank Gawd!"

"But listen, Uncle Ben," said Marlowe, interrupting his loquacity and taking him silently by the arm. "I cannot speak, I cannot clear myself; we have sworn an oath to keep silent and let the people think what they will; do you understand?"

"Oh, Lawd! Mas'r Walter," cried the negro astounded, "you ain't gwine to tell Honey you did'n kill her pa?"

"Hush!" said Marlowe. "I must think of

that hereafter; listen to me now, whether you believe me guilty or not."

"Me tink you guilty, Mas'r Walter? Gawd fo'gib you fur sayin'dat! I know some o' you young men dun kill my poor mas'r, but I know 'twant you, an' if everbody in de wide yarth turn agin you I gwine to stick to you, 'deed I is! I jis' hopin' you was comin' home to clar yoursef. Judge Napier, he was here dis ebenin to talk to your pa 'bout you all."

"What did they say? Quick!"

"He said if dere warn't no witnesses to be found, de gran' jury could'n git a bill gin nobody an' de matter would be drapped."

"Then Uncle Ben will be the one to keep us posted," said Randolph King.

"Will you promise to do it, Uncle Ben?" asked Marlowe.

"'Deed I will, Mas'r Walter, you know I do anyting fur you. I hates powerful bad to be shiel'n de man what murdered my poor mas'r, but ef it gwine ter help you ouden trouble I do eben dat; Gawd knows I will."

"Will you go into town to-morrow and find out how things are and let us know?"

"Yas, sah, I do anyting fur you."

"Then where can you meet us to-morrow night?" inquired Caldwell.

Here was an opportunity to make himself important, and amid all his deeper emotions of sorrow and anxiety it allured the old fellow.

"Lemme see," he said, scratching his head, "lemme deflect a minit, kase you ha' to be powerful keerful. Mas'r Walter dun bought me from de trash, and beat him for 'sultin me, an' I gwine ter stick to Mas'r Walter till de las' day in de ebenin'."

"Well, then, for heaven's sake, hurry up," urged Holbrook, "and tell us your plan!"

"Well, den, in de fust place you gem'men have to be keerful an 'don' do nuffin rashinal, but jes' keep away to-morrer, an' I'll sorter hang roun' an' find out ef dey's on yer track; an' to-morrow night you come up to de graveyard an' hide away so nobody caint see you from de road; dey wont go fro' dar in de dark; dey's too skeered; an' when its gittin' kind o' late, an' dere ain't nobody much gwine' long, I cum by, kinder singin' to myself; you listen to dat song, an' ef I's singin' a song o'

good tidin's an' great joy, Mas'r Walter, you'll know dar ain't no evidence 'gin you, an' you kin all go home; but ef I's singin' sad an' mournful like, you better git away fur parts unknown."

And so it was arranged. Marlowe lingered a moment behind the others and asked something of Uncle Ben in an undertone, concerning Laurie; he did not wish the others to know what it was; and after making the faithful creature promise not to let his father know of this visit, parted from him, rejoined his friends and withdrew again into the darkness.

CHAPTER X

Hank Staples spent Sunday afternoon, after he had heard the news, skulking about the river bank. He gnawed his finger nails hungrily and gave other signs of great perturbation of mind. "His day" had come, sooner than he had expected. He was in a dire strait between his hatred of the students, especially Marlowe, and his fear of them, his desire to give some damning testimony against them on the morrow, for which he had enough truth to make a handle, and his dread of the vengeance they would most likely take upon him for such an act.

They were bound to silence, and even if they should return, could not disprove his statement, but who was to preserve him from the vengeance of the "M.K's"? Could he only be sure they had gone for good, that was what he desired above all things; then he would accuse Marlowe to Laurie directly as her

father's murderer. He thought that but for Marlowe he might have won the girl himself.

It was said that with the exception of the major, Hank Staples had not a friend; but that was not literally true. There was one other who loved him and was true to him always, when others cursed and reviled him, keeping his cheerless home in his absence, and greeting him with a cordial welcome when he returned. This solitary companion bore him company this afternoon, perhaps from a certain fellow feeling, being, like Hank himself, an outcast, by all despised—a poor, skulking, half-breed dog.

This forlorn creature kept close to his heels, walking when he walked, sitting on his long haunches when he sat. The master had fallen into the habit of talking to his canine friend, which was just one better than talking to himself; the dog sitting opposite him with his lean body, and his huge head a little to one side like a stem supporting a flower, a look of starved sagacity on his features. He was sitting thus, listening to the pros and cons of the case Hank was putting to

him, when a sudden inspiration came upon the master, with a rush of delight; he expressed it by giving his listener a kick under the jaw, that sent him across the fields, yelping with pain. He knew it meant "go home"—that was his usual signal of dismissal.

The thought which occurred to the two legged cur was this, and he acted upon it—he would give only as much testimony as was safe at present, charging no one distinctly, but coloring his statements so that they would reflect injuriously on all. Then, if time elapsed and they did not return, proving that he had nothing to fear, he could make a further statement accusing Marlowe directly of the deed, stating (which would have a tone of plausibility) that he had been deterred from doing so at first through mortal fear of the friends.

This plan arranged, he went home and kept quiet until Monday morning. He had testified before the coroner's jury that he had been in the presence of the deceased and the six students until after two o'clock on Sunday morning. He gave a detailed account of the

mischiefs perpetrated by them in the town. He went on to state that he left them because the party had been drinking freely, and "went on a teasin' an' naggin' the major" and that he—Hank Staples—"bein' a law-abidin' citizen, and not wantin' to break the Sabbath-day, jes' clared out an 'left 'em."

His story, in some parts true, was a jumble of distorted facts, filled with innuendo calculated to create the strongest suspicion against the students, and it accomplished its purpose.

Judge Napier was present; he said, "My son was with them, but if the crime was his, I do not see any other way than that he should suffer for it. We do not know the circumstances, there may have been justifiable grounds; but let them come forward, I say, and make their own defense."

The old minister, Dr. Marlowe, only said, "The Lord's will be done!"

The students, especially Marlowe and Napier, were intensely popular, but Major McNaughton also had many friends still; and a certain element demanded that an example

of one of that lawless band be held up to the others. A warrant was issued for the arrest of the six students, Harry Napier, Walter Marlowe, Randolph King, Lewis Holbrook, Ernest Caldwell and Arthur Dalton.

Late that night six anxious watchers, concealed among the gravestones, heard the voice of the old man singing a weird, sweet melody; he passed by slowly and they could hear the ominous lines:

“ Hark! from the tombs a doleful soun,’
Mine ears attend de cry;
Ye libin’ men, cum view de groun’
Whar you must shortly lie.”

And before the echoes died on the air there was a brief good-bye, a silent grip of the hand and a hurried mounting of swift horses that were to bear their riders, east, west, and south, far from their homes and from each other before the morning should break. For some of them it was a final parting.

CHAPTER XI

It was about three days after the events described in the last chapter. Poor Laurie (for it seemed as though one should not call her by that childish pet name now, since her matriculation in the great mystery of grief;) had wept her tears all away, she thought, and sat drooping by the open window like a pale blossom overtaken and beaten down by winter storms when it had looked for an early summer.

Uncle Ben had given her a short parting message from Marlowe bidding her think as kindly of him as she could, and saying that he would do all in his power to see her or communicate with her soon.

He had been enjoined to say that and that alone, but the poor old fellow could not keep his secret from her, and violated his promise so far as to let her know her lover had left the country. She heard him dully, being

stupefied with grief; the measure of her endurance then was full, and could not be added to. When they brought her dead home, *alone*, she had felt the keenest pang her heart could know, and any other misfortune seemed but to lengthen out the tale.

No voice accused Walter in her hearing, but she divined, with that ingenuity for self-torture which belongs to love, what they were saying elsewhere. She did not think him guilty of her father's murder; but she had not believed that he would break his promise to her that fatal day, and yet he had done it, and was now a fugitive; why had he gone if innocent?

The old nurse eyed her askance as she sat there silent and listless, her face looking pale above her somber mourning dress, and wished that something would come, if it were only a fresh reminder of her loss, to rouse her pet from this deadly apathy; it frightened her.

The bitter message of her son's disappearance had brought the proud mother home a heart-broken woman. The unhappiness of the past months had culminated in this! The

head that held itself so high was bowed at last. The nerves so cruelly tried through that new estrangement could not bear the shock, and the wretched woman succumbed to an utter prostration, bodily and mentally. In a few days she was a wreck of the woman all C— had known and stood a little in awe of, for twenty-five years.

In the hush of her darkened chamber, she went over the last few months in bitter self-accusation, the estrangement which had been her own doing, her hard pride that had stood between her darling boy and his wish. Once she had awakened from a horrible nightmare and could not afterward shake off the premonition it left with her. Walter had appeared to her, pale and haggard with the weird exaggeration of dreams, and told her that the deed was his, and that he did it because he knew that she would never give his darling a kind welcome while the plebeian father lived. She imparted her dread to none, but that face, with its hunted look, never left her.

Uncle Ben, free to roam whither he would,

spent a great part of his time on the road between the two houses.

Aunt Viney saw him coming up the path and hailed his advent more gladly than ever now; the dead silence of the house was appalling to her. She stood in the kitchen door to welcome him. He took a seat on a bench under the shade trees and began fanning himself with his hat.

"I got 'portant business s'mornin'," he said. "I met dat Hank Staples in de road, and he says fur to tell Honey he got to hab a intervoo wid her 'mejity on pressin' business. I 'lowed she would'n want to be talkin' to him, but Mas'r Duncan, he say, 'Tell her she better see him, kase he kin make heap o' trouble ef he's min' to'."

"Yes," said Aunt Viney, "let's hear what Hank's got to say; I ain't got no conference in him, but ef he know anyting fur our good, we better hear it."

To this Laurie reluctantly consented, and accordingly the visitor soon presented himself. He entered the room with a shuffling step, his hat in his hand. He was always a

little less confident and aggressive in Laurie's presence than elsewhere.

"Now look here, ladies," began Hank, "this meetin's called fur the good of all parties. I've got news of great importance, and if I am treated squar', well; if not,—not well; therefore which?"

"Stop dat nonsense, Hank Staples, an'don' you try to be m'sterious wid me; go long an' tell de trufe—if you kin."

"Fust and fo'most then," continued Mr. Staples, taking his seat on the southeast corner of the chair and trying to look at ease, "I want to ax what is the young lady's feelin's tow'rds Walter Marlowe now?"

"The same as ever," answered Laurie; then she looked at him more directly, and asked, "What is that to you?"

This was a little damping at the outset.

"Circumstances alters cases, as they say, miss," he went on; "you seem to furgit that your pa has been murdered; Walter Marlowe was with the crowd what killed him, and ef he had a' loved you proper he would ha'saved his life; see?"

"You do not know but that he did try, and was overpowered by the others; you say you left them at the bridge. Do you know anything about it?"

"Wall, I know a heap more'n you think, and what I've got to say is brief and to the pint. I've long felt that me and Miss Laurie was made fur one 'nuther, and now the way is cl'ar. Thar ain't nobody to consult 'bout it but the parties to the contrac' and Aunt Viney, as it were. Now, before I perceed any further, I wants a answer to my proposition, which is the followin'—that we git married at wunst."

A shudder of horror and contempt was Laurie's only reply, but Aunt Viney was more ready of speech; still, she remembered the minister's warning.

"Hank Staples," she said, placing her hands on her hips, which signified that she meant what she said, "'fore we goes any fuder, we wants ter know what you's gwine ter testify afore us; ef it's the same what you said 'fore de cor'ner's jury, I don' see no use in yer sayin' it agin, an' ef its sumpin differ'nt, den yo's

a liar, and nobody don' know which tale to put no conference in."

Hank Staples arose from his chair with an evil look upon his face. He saw that Laurie looked at him now with loathing. An expression of devilish cunning, of revengeful animosity, distorted his features.

"Do I understan' that I am rejected; that my kind offer has been trampled under foot?"

Laurie only turned from him and looked out of the window, and Aunt Viney said, pointing to the door, "Go 'long!"

"All right, then," gesticulating with his slouched hat, "jist look out fur me! I knows enough to hang that fine sweetheart of yourn, and I'll tell it too, if I'm shot fur it."

"He has gone," said Laurie; "none of us will ever see him again—I think."

"Well, thar's whar you make a mistake miss; the others is gone, I reck'n, but Marlowe's a hangin' roun' here to git a chance to see you 'fore he goes."

Her listlessness was gone in an instant; she started up and a bright flush of color leapt to her cheeks. "How do you know?"

where is he?" she questioned him eagerly.

"Don't tell no more lies, Hank Staples," interposed Aunt Viney; "nobody would'n believe nuffin you say cep'n they knowed it 'fore-han'."

"What do you say to that, young lady?" said Hank, turning to Laurie. "Is them your sentiments?"

"Oh, Hank, let us be friends." All at once life seemed worth living again, and she offered her hand in token of friendship.

He misunderstood her, seized her hand eagerly and drew her to him; attempting to kiss her.

She retreated with a scream toward Aunt Viney.

"Oh, mammy! do not let him touch me! the wretch!"

"G'way fum yere! you miser'ble white trash, or I break you' head wid de tongs!" shouted Aunt Viney, putting one arm around Laurie, and seizing the aforesaid article with the other.

"All right—all right, ladies," called out Mr. Staples, who had rapidly retreated to the door;

"ef you want us to be enemies that suits me jest as well;" and with an oath upon his lips he left the house. He went home with thoughts more bitter than ever against Marlowe; he knew now how Laurie loved his rival, but he did not despair of winning her yet. That night he walked to the house of Sheriff Benson, about half a mile from the town. It was about ten o'clock when he was admitted. After some preliminary conversation Hank said, "Sheriff, you got a warrant fur the arrest of all the men what was with the major the night he was killed?"

"Yes," said the sheriff, "for all and each of them, and one for you too."—It was bedtime and he wished his visitor to go;—"I've had my eye on you ever since Monday."

"What you got a warrant fur me fur? I ain't done nothin'."

"Perhaps not, but we shall need you as a witness."

"S'posen it should turn out that I was with the boys when the old man was killed, and saw the whole perceedin'?"

"Then you would be *particeps criminis* in the murder."

"Golly! I wouldn't like to be that; how long would a fellow have to go to jail fur that?"

"That depends."

"Say, sheriff, give me a chaw tobaccer."

The plug was handed hi

"Would you like to ketch one of them fellows, sheriff?"

"That's my business—that's what these warrants are for."

"All right; I'll put you on the track of one of 'em to-night, if you'll promise to keep me outen any trouble."

If you become state's evidence of course you'll be protected; but, Hank, you are such a liar it wouldn't be worth while to follow any clew you would set us on."

"You jist wait, and see ef I don't show you one of 'em purty soon."

"All right then," continued the sheriff; he began to think perhaps there was something in the fellow's head more than he had told on Monday. "If we catch your man I'll give you two hundred,—that's the reward that's offered; and if it's a false alarm I'll lock you up for a month. Do you agree to that?"

"Give me a drink o' whisky, sheriff."

The whisky was ordered and when the negro boy brought it, the sheriff said to him: "Jim, go over to Mr. Bob Terry's and tell him to come here right away."

Mr. Staples helped himself and said: "Sheriff, s'posen I was to prove—I aint swearin' now, am I?"

"No, I'll tell you when you are in danger."

"S'posen I could prove who killed the old man, could you pertect me from the law, and the friends of the feller what done it?"

"I think I could."

"Well, then, I'll think it over;" taking another sip from his glass of whisky. "Why, Bob, how're you? You must a come on a run. It's a good thing you come, Bob, fur we'll want some fighters in the crowd to-night; I'm a goin' to 'stonish this yere town fur oncet."

"Terry," said the sheriff, "I want you to swear Mr. Staples and take his testimony."

"Ah!" said Mr. Terry, "got a statement to make, eh?"

Hank's answer was a shrewd wink of his left eye.

Deponent took the oath and proceeded: "Las' night I followed Unc' Ben down to the swamp; I thought he was looking fur some 'possum traps what he had thar las' winter; and I thought I mought as well find out whar they wuz; when he got down close to the river bank he gin a little whistle and what yer think come to meet him!"

"What! you don't mean to say he's raising a litter o' pups in the swamp?"

"No 'twarnt no dog," resumed Hank solemnly, "it were a man!"

"Go on," said Terry.

"The man jumped in the river with his clothes all on, and swum over to Unc' Ben. I crep' up close as I could, 'thout bein' seen, and listened to what they wuz sayin'. The long and short of it was that Unc' Ben was to fix up things so's Marlowe (that's who 'twas) could come up to-night at one o'clock and see Laurie McNaughton. He kep a sayin' ef he could see her, he knowed he could git her to go with him; and ef she wouldn't then he'd git away fur good and she'd never see him again."

"At one o'clock to-night!" exclaimed the

sheriff. "That will do, Hank;" he said sternly and rose from the table. "If this turns out to be true, you will get your two hundred dollars"—(he might have said "your revenge too.") "Come, gentlemen."

The three went out together, and summoning three others, the sheriff had them take their revolvers and proceed to the vicinity of the McNaughton house. They were posted in convenient places commanding every exit from the house, and Hank Staples was to give them notice when the game was to be trapped.

CHAPTER XII

At an hour past midnight a tapping was heard at the window of the dining-room of the McNaughton house. It was a low, cautious rap, and Aunt Viney went softly to the window, and looked out. There was no moon and the window was very high from the ground, the house being a typical Southern one, built high and enclosed with a sort of lattice work, in order to let the air blow under it. She saw the figures of men on the ground, but could not at first distinguish them. One of them kept in the shadow of some lilac bushes.

"Who's dar?" she inquired in that high whisper which says so plainly, "I'm scared; but you shan't know it."

"It's Unc' Ben, don't be skeered;" answered the familiar voice, also in a whisper.

"'Fore Gawd!" ejaculated Aunt Viney. "What yer doin' yere dis time o' night?"

"Hesh, Sis' Viney—talk low; I's got Honey's sweetheart wid me."

"'Fore Gawd!" she said again; which was her ultimatum of astonishment—"Mas'r Walter, dat you?"

"Yes," was the answer, as the other form stepped out into the lighted space. "I must see Laurie now; I have not a minute to spare; tell her I must speak with her for one moment."

"Well, ef you's cum back to clar yo'self it'll be all right, an' why can't you wait tell in de mornin', fur to see her? Dis ain't no time fur a gem'man to call on a young lady."

"No, Sis' Viney," spoke up Uncle Ben, "de young mas'r's in danger an' he ain't got no time to stay; ef he don' see her to-night, he ain't gwine to see her no mo'."

"Yes," said Walter, coming closer and looking up, so that even in the uncertain light she saw how pale his face was, "that is true; I cannot stay till morning; for God's sake, go, quickly!"

"Oh, my Lawd, come in den," she groaned, disappearing from the window and opening

the door; "but keep quiet, so's not to skeer de chile; you wait yere tell I goes an' wake her up kin' o' gentle like."

Marlowe and Uncle Ben entered silently. When Aunt Viney opened the door of Laurie's room, she found the girl still kneeling where she had fallen asleep worn out, with a prayer upon her lips. A light shadow of slumber had overtaken her and her head had fallen forward; her arms were stretched out across the bed.

The old woman raised a soft, curling strand of hair and kissed it, bending over her lovingly.

Laurie, roused by the light touch, started up, a frightened look in her wide-opened eyes.

"Now don' you be skeered, Honey," Aunt Viney began; "somebody's come."

The girl swept past her like a bird; in a moment she had crossed the hallway and reached the room where Walter stood. She paused an instant in the doorway; the room was in obscurity and she could not discern his whereabouts.

He called her name and stepping into the

dim light of the window held out his arms to her; in a moment she was clasped in their embrace. He had thought to kneel and sue for grace to speak to her, and here she was upon his breast, as in the morning when he had gone from her with high hopes in his heart. Old Ben bowed his head and wept in the shadow.

Her face was hidden on her lover's breast, his arms clasping her close, close to his heart.

She did not see that the right arm was bandaged, and that he moved it with great pain. He was there with his arms about her, that was enough. The precious minutes were flying fast, but neither could find heart to speak. The emotion of meeting made silence between them.

He bent his head in a heart-broken gesture and touched her hair lightly with his lips.

"Oh! Walter," she sobbed, after a little, "I have been so unhappy; why did you stay away from me? They brought him home white and dead, Walter; and people said you were with his murderers; but you will tell them who did the cruel thing—that it was not you;

you will tell them to-morrow, won't you, Walter?"

She raised her head and looked closely into his eyes in the abandon of her excitement.

He turned from the intense gaze for an instant, and clenched his teeth in the agony of his soul. "Listen, Laurie—my darling, my love;" he cried in a passionate voice, kneeling at her feet and pressing her hands to his lips—"I cannot clear myself; I cannot say it was not I; forgive me, dear, if you can; be patient and listen to me a little. I tried—upon my honor, I tried to keep my promise to you that terrible day, but circumstances were hard against me."

He felt her hands grow cold within his and tremble; he looked up and saw a spasm of fear cross her face.

"O Walter, Walter, what do you mean? O, you were all the world to me! What do you mean by what you are saying?"

"My darling, it means that if you love me, if I am more to you than aught else, as you say, you will come with me to-night—now, without a moment's delay, and trust in me.

I can explain nothing now—I am bound by my word of honor to keep silent. Try to trust me, Laurie, and come before it is too late; I am in danger if I stay a minute too long; Uncle Ben has been to my stables and brought fast horses for us to ride; they are waiting for us down in the swamp road; come, love, let us go."

He had risen and was gently urging her towards the door; his eyes glittered with excitement; she yielded to the fascination of his voice and was allowing herself to be led when old Viney's voice called from out of the obscurity of the room, "Don' yo' go, Honey, don' you go, till he tell yo'who tuk an' killed yo' pa."

The voice brought her back to the present; she drew her hands from his grasp and stood wringing them in helpless misery.

"O Walter, I cannot go;" she cried; "if you are innocent stay here and defend yourself."

"You think me guilty?"

"O, no, no, forgive me; I do not believe it; but tell me who it was that killed my dear

father; I know it was not you; only tell me with your own lips that you had no hand in that cruel deed, and I will not ask you anything more; I will go with you, and I will believe you though all the world should swear that you were guilty."

"No, Laurie, I cannot; but no one will ever swear that I am guilty, we have already sworn to be silent. I have no choice, for every man will keep that oath, would have his tongue burned out before he would turn state's evidence."

He took her hand again, and drew her towards the door. Once more she implored him:

"O Walter, I will not ask you to tell on the others; only tell me that it was not you."

"I cannot!"

"You cannot say that? Then God forgive you, Walter!"

He stepped toward her again, and for the first time she saw the bandages on his arm, and that there were stains of blood still upon them.

"Look! Look!" she shrieked, cowering in

terror on Aunt Viney's breast, "the blood on your arm!"

Aunt Viney caught the falling figure in her arms and turned angrily upon Marlowe.

"Go 'way now, ef you's satisfied!" she cried, "You's done broke my baby's heart, you is!"

"All is over now," he cried, unheeding the old woman's words and taking the little nerveless hand in his; "she will forget me, or think of me only with horror. Take care of her,—I cannot stay, maybe I can come again; I do not know; if not, good-bye—O my darling, good-bye forever!"

Uncle Ben came up from his post of observation and touched Marlowe on the arm, saying something to him quickly in a whisper. He hurried to the door and flung it open; too late—every avenue of escape was guarded by men with pistols cocked and ready to receive him.

He saw that retreat was impossible, and walked out upon the balcony determined to sell his life as dearly as possible. He was driven to desperation at last. He recognized Hank Staples skulking behind the other men,

and knew that he was the informant who had betrayed him. He drew his revolver with his left hand, and aimed it at his enemy; but Uncle Ben was close at his side, and before he could fire, pulled down his arm.

"Stop, Mas'r Walter!" cried the old fellow clinging to him with both hands; "does you want to die a murderer's def anyhow fur killin' dat trash? Tink o' Honey—tink o' yo' folks, an' wait—de Lawd, he gwine to bring it all right—'deed he will!"

After the first impulse of wrath at beholding his old enemy—the man who had presumed to love Laurie—among his captors, he felt the other impulse revive in him, to live for her sake, even yet. He delivered his weapons to the sheriff, and submitted quietly to arrest. When Laurie recovered consciousness, he was gone.

CHAPTER XIII

There was never a case in the county of N—that created so much excitement as that in which Walter Marlowe was tried for the murder of Marshall McNaughton.

There were few who believed him personally guilty. His manner nonplused his own counsel. His mother sent a message from her sick room, imploring him to make the best defense he could; and it would be hard to describe poor Laurie's agony of mind, when she discovered that she had detained him by her indecision and caused him to be captured. It soon transpired that the strange silence of the prisoner was in accordance with the oath of the "M. K's," to which all of the missing party had belonged; and this strange oath might still have accomplished its end, but for an element they had not counted upon—Hank Staples and his enmity.

The circumstances that looked so hard

against Marlowe, his refusal to make an explanation, and the high standing he held in the community, created such a perfect balance in the jury's mind, that it only required a touch to turn them to the one side or the other. Hank Staples' testimony was, in the absence of any other, sufficient to turn the scale against the accused.

In the meantime, the interest for and against the young man was working up the citizens of C— to a white heat of excitement. As the time of trial drew on the animosity between the two factions became more marked. The blue blood of the state was feverish. Old men who had not carried a weapon for years took their derringers from the drawer when they went into town.

Ladies who had been close friends quarreled over the reputation of the men under indictment, and became enemies. The prisoner was the only one who had nothing to say.

His silence alienated many of the disinterested who had expected that he would speedily clear himself.

The heart-broken mother, pale and emaciated, came to the prison every day, as soon as she was able. She denounced her own conduct towards him during the past months and humbled her pride, promising to make reparation to the orphan girl, and receive her as his wife with all kindness, if he would only defend himself—to all of which he could only reply, turning away, his heart sick within him:

“I cannot! I cannot!”

Laurie came, too, and it was a kind of relief when the day of trial drew near, for he felt unable to endure their entreaties longer.

Dr. Marlowe said to him, “My son, if this is any foolish punctilio which is sealing your lips, remember the pain it is giving your mother and the girl who loves you; but, if you feel that your honor is really pledged to this course, then remember only that a man must be always a Christian and a gentleman.”

It grew to be a matter of much speculation whether he would speak or not; and with the citizens in this state of mind, the appointed time for the trial drew on.

The afternoon sun was striking a few bars of gold through the grating of Marlowe's prison, when the door opened and let in a blaze of light. The prisoner started up and raised his hand to shade his eyes from the unwonted glare. The door had closed again before he knew who had entered; by that time, Carlo's paws were upon his breast and a silky head close to his own; then he saw his mother and Laurie come towards him, and he knew they had come to make their last appeal against his resolve.

They begged him to promise that he would speak to-morrow, and name the murderer. He was worn out with the conflict of emotions and felt that he could endure no more.

"Dear mother—dear Laurie;" he said, taking a hand of each, and turning his weary eyes from one to the other—"you do not know what you are doing; listen to me; what you urge me to do, I tell you, for the hundredth time, is impossible; I have no option in the matter; I am bound by a bond which every man holds sacred, to keep silent, and let things go as they will; I can do nothing. Do

not urge me any more. Let us hope for the best, it cannot be that you innocent ones are to suffer much more for me."

He did not feel the confidence he attempted to inspire the women with, and his mother was not deceived.

"And what of this bond?" she cried excitedly; "is there no bond between you and me, that forbids a son to break his mother's heart? And this girl whom you have said you loved, —do you owe more to that foolish oath than to her? Beware, boy, how you trample upon your mother's prayer! Look! my pride is crushed, I kneel to you."

She was half beside herself with her mental and bodily suffering. She fell upon her knees, sobbing hysterically.

"And so do I!" cried Laurie, kneeling also; "Have pity on us, dear Walter, and save yourself for our sake—we love you so."

He sprang up, pale as death, and turned his face to the wall; it was the first time he had broken down. He folded his arms against the stone wall, and bowed his head upon them. He had thought this conflict over, and

here was the worst ordeal to come yet. For an instant, he was almost ready to sacrifice everything to those two women who loved him—and then, swift as lightning, came the after thought—would one of the others break that oath of the mid-knights, foolish as it had been to take it?

He felt that they would not; it had been a point of honor with them so long; and should he be the first to break it? How could he ever meet one of them in after years with such a shadow upon him? No, it was wrong, perhaps, to take that pledge, but having taken it he must keep it to the end. He was silent so long they thought they had gained their point. The mother came to him and touched his elbow—"Have you decided?" she asked tremulously—"think of it, they will send you back to prison, and disgrace you, perhaps. O! God! they will hang you, if you do not speak, do not tell them that it was not you. No one will suffer by it; they are far away and will never return; why should you bear it all?"

"O, mother, mother!" he murmured, turning to her and raising her hands to his lips;

"think of it? Have I not thought of it through long days and sleepless nights? Would you have me the spectacle of all men, as the one who could not keep faith? It would kill me, mother; I could not live it down."

"And it will kill me if you do not," she cried, growing excited again; "it shall not be! You shall not refuse me this. Have I not lived for you? Your youth, your future is mine, boy, and you shall not sacrifice it to an idle scruple!"

Laurie sat upon the prison bench, one hand clasped above the other on her knee, a picture of speechless misery. She remembered the night when he had pleaded with her as they now pleaded with him, and to no avail.

They heard the jailer approaching, and they had accomplished nothing.

"They are coming, girl," said the elder woman, shaking Laurie roughly by the shoulder; "have you nothing to say? He refuses his mother, perhaps he will listen to you."

The girl came forward, and raised her sad face to him; he took both her hands in his, and looked long into her eyes. "Do you still

refuse?" his mother asked, with something of her old imperious manner. It angered her that she could not bend him to her will.

"Dear, won't you promise?" whispered Laurie.

"Anything but that, my darling," he said once more, his voice tremulous with pain; "if I were base enough for that, I would not deserve your love. Do not urge me, dear love, I *cannot* do it."

The jailer entered, and they took their leave; the mother had broken down again, and was weeping bitterly; Laurie passed her arm around her, and they went away together, the dog, after a caress and a word from the master, following. "Let us be brave, and hope for the best," he said to them, and tried to maintain a steady countenance until they were gone; then threw himself on his cot, and lay there with his face buried in his hands, enduring the agonies of an utter despair, until the man entered with the evening meal. He saw no way out of his hopeless situation.

CHAPTER XIV

The third day of the trial had begun, Judge Napier presiding. Through many years of public service on the judicial bench he had won the name of an incorruptible judge.

It was a mark of the people's confidence in his integrity that he was desired to remain in his place during this trial, though his own son had been one of the prisoner's companions. He offered to resign his seat to Judge Carter of an adjoining county, but at the general solicitation had kept it.

Accordingly, the venerable judge sat and heard the case, ruling with the utmost impartiality, until all the circumstantial evidence had been well discussed by both sides. A shrewd query put by the state's counsel had elicited a piece of testimony very damaging to the prisoner. Dr. Marlowe was asked upon the stand if there had ever been, to his knowledge, any ill feeling between the accused and

his mother on account of the former's connection with the McNaughtons. He was obliged to testify that there had been some estrangement from that cause.

"Had it been on account of the girl's dissipated father, that the lady had objected to receiving her as her son's wife?"

He was again compelled to say that it was; and, seeing how this testimony would affect the case, the old man's face blanched with dismay. He attempted to qualify his answer, but the examining lawyer said curtly, "That is sufficient," and the minister was dismissed from the stand.

The point was a telling one and he made the most of it. "Here at last," he said, turning triumphantly to the jury, "we have the motive; surely, this is conclusive."

The testimony created a sensation, and after that, things began to look more and more dark for the defendant.

The witnesses for the defense had all testified to the prisoner's high standing, to his integrity and truthfulness in the past; also the two old servants of the McNaughtons testified

to the amicable relations always existing between the accused and their deceased master, but there was no positive evidence to be given on his behalf.

At last Mr. Hank Staples was called. He repeated substantially what he had said at the coroner's inquest, only many things that he then implied, he now openly asserted.

"You stated at the inquest," began the state's attorney, "that after you heard hard words between the prisoner and deceased, you escaped to the opposite side of the river and saw nothing more of them during the night; where did you go immediately afterward?"

"I told a lie when I said that," said Hank, bringing a shock of surprise to his hearers.

"Why did you lie to the coroner?"

"I was afeard the boys would kill me ef I testified agin 'em."

"Why are you not still afraid?"

"Wall, the sheriff 'lowed as they'd all left the country cep'n Marlowe an' I knowed he'd be hung ef I tol' the truth."

"Well, will you proceed and tell us what occurred the night of the murder?"

Witness then stated that although he had left the party at the time of the accident, he still kept them in sight, because he felt that his friend the major was being imposed upon; that he heard the voices of Marlowe and the major in an angry altercation. He crept closer to the speakers, who had drawn a little apart from the others. He heard enough to understand that the prisoner was trying to persuade the major to leave C— and promise not to return and disgrace him and Laurie; and was offering him a high price to do so. According to his statement, the prisoner had said that he could never take the girl home as his wife until the father was out of the way, and the major had resented this; a scuffle ensued. "An' the next thing I knowed," the witness continued, working himself up to a state of enthusiasm, "Marlowe outs with his knife, and I 'lowed he was gwine to kill the ole man, so I rushed in atween 'em; but 'fore I could git thar, he'd done struck the major wunst an' was drawin' back for 'nuther. Then I pulled out my knife an' made that thar cut what you see on Marlowe's arm," making an awkward,

left-handed gesture toward the prisoner, who watched him intently but had not been able to catch the orator's eye.

"Then," he further stated, "all the fellers wuz on to me; and when I got up the ole man wuz dead. They all stood 'round an' made me swar to keep quiet 'bout the whole business. Mr. Holbrook, he sez, sez he, 'Now, Hank Staples, you've swore the oath of the mid-knights, an' ef you don' keep it quiet you'll go whar the major is; don't you forgit that.' Then they let me go, an' so I 'lowed I'd jist better go 'long home an' hol' my tongue, tell them young college chaps wuz outen the way."

The witness resumed his seat and still had not looked at the prisoner. Marlowe had understood that this would be the end.

During the first days of the trial they had placed Laurie in a part of the court-room where he could not see her, but now, as he glanced listlessly around the house, his glance fell upon her where she sat in full view clinging to the old nurse's hand. She was leaning forward, her wide eyes fixed upon the pris-

over. The lips were parted and her breath came heavily through them, but a ray of something almost like hope lighted the sweet little worn face. Their eyes met, and the mute appeal in Laurie's for love, and life, and happiness, struck through the despairing calm he had maintained throughout the trial, and pierced him to the heart.

He bowed his head upon his hand, and the arm that supported it visibly trembled. An agony of temptation swept through him like the breath of the sirocco, fierce and blinding; for a moment he was deaf to the voices, blind to the faces before him. In the light of that look he had caught across the crowded courtroom, the vision of a felon's death passed before him with ghastly reality—the loss of all men's respect, of life, of Laurie, appalled him with a sudden new power.

A voice from some unknown depth in his nature cried out to him, "Speak! speak! before it is too late and your foolish scruple has killed yourself and her." He knew that soon another chance would be given him, and the eternal question put to him for the last time, "guilty" or "not guilty."

It seemed such a little thing to do; only to speak and turn the accusation against some other member of the party, and he would be acquitted. All the other men were out of harm's way, and would probably never be affected one iota, so far as their liberty was concerned, by his act. He had never been so near yielding.

Then came the other voice with its unvarying reply: "Yes, speak, and you will save all—but honor!" It was the still voice, but for the thousandth time it conquered. That "honor" he must keep though all his world were lost for it. Exaggerated as his idea of it was, perhaps, that idol "honor" had ruled his life, and must rule his death if need be; denuded of all youth clings to, of respect, of love, and joy, still, that abstract of his boyish worship lured him in the face of shame, disgrace and death. "It was my sin," he said, "to take lightly upon my lips a solemn oath; it is my punishment that I must fulfill it to the letter, or hide my face from the sight of men forever."

When Marlowe raised his head again he

felt he had lived a lifetime of doubt and conflict, but had escaped a great fall, worse than death. The cold sweat of agony was damp upon his hands and forehead. He breathed again, and those near him wondered to hear him utter a deep "Thank God!"

He turned his eyes again to the witness-stand, and for a moment it was impossible for him to comprehend what he saw; there stood Laurie, her face, from which every vestage of color had faded, even to the lips, fixed upon the defendant's lawyer who was examining her. Her hands were clasped before her in the effort to still their trembling. It had been agreed by the prosecution that she should not be summoned as a witness, and Marlowe had pleaded with his own lawyer that it should not be done. Then he realized that the astute lawyer had duped him, and brought her forward as a last resource.

In fact, the attorney, when his last hope of influencing the prisoner to make a statement had vanished, called upon Laurie and explained that his forlorn remaining hope was that Marlowe might have confessed something

to her in his extremity. Her manner convinced him that he was right; it was at that moment, perhaps, she had taken her resolve.

Marlowe wondered what it all meant. What good could her testimony do? Then the examination continued, and he realized that what he would not stoop to do for himself, she was going to do for him.

Her unexpected appearance on the stand had created a sensation; to see her standing there so frail-looking and terrified by the stern surroundings while he sat helpless, was almost more than he could bear.

"You say you saw the prisoner on the night of his arrest; for what purpose did he return to see you?"

Her lips parted to answer, but the words were inaudible. The lawyer changed the form of his query: "Was that the first time you had seen the prisoner after your father's death?"

"Yes."

"What was the object of his visit?"

"He wanted me to go with him."

"Did you refuse to do so?"

"I refused at first."

"Why did you refuse?"

"Because I—because they had said he was with the murderers."

"Did you believe him guilty of your father's murder?"

"I did not believe him guilty, but begged him to tell me that he was not."

"Did you make that a condition of your going with him?"

"Yes."

"Did you beg that he would confide to you alone the name of the guilty one?"

"Yes."

"What was his reply to this?"

In his anticipated triumph the lawyer drew forth this testimony word for word and failed to see what all the others saw, that the witness was on the point of fainting.

He paused to make a note of her evidence, and she glanced at the prisoner. Her eyes fell before his, and a burning blush mounted to her forehead. It was the supreme moment of her life; the last hope for the defense hung upon her answer. She stood support-

ing herself by one hand upon the railing, the other she clasped in the folds of her dress. Her eyes were fixed upon the floor.

The counsel, now sure of her reply, repeated the question in his kindest tone, trying to reassure her.

"Did the prisoner then comply with your request?"

Another painful silence; then a strange thing happened—the girl threw up her arms in a wild gesture and a bitter, wailing "No! No! No!" escaped her. Truth had triumphed, for her strength had not been equal to her love.

From that moment the prisoner's doom was sealed.

By tacit agreement the pitiable episode was passed over in silence. Sympathy for her in the court-room amounted almost to agony. The case was taken up where Hank Staples' testimony had left it.

Turning to the jury, the prosecuting attorney said, "Gentlemen of the jury, fortunately you will not be under the unpleasant necessity of convicting the prisoner on purely circumstantial evidence, strong as it is in this

case. This witness, Mr. Staples, being formerly in mortal fear of the violence of these young men, in whose company he was on that fatal night, for that reason has kept back important evidence to shield them, but now being troubled in conscience, and moved by the promptings of duty, he has come forward and given you a detailed account of this most atrocious assassination!"

The witness, sitting in his place, was so strangely affected by the unwonted experience of hearing himself well spoken of, that he had to pinch his ear to convince himself that he was not dreaming.

The mother of the prisoner, now utterly prostrated since her last visit to the prison, was confined to her bed, and delirium interposed to save her from the scene which was so soon to take place in the court-room, with her idolized son as the central figure.

The prisoner was asked again if he wished to say anything in his own defense.

"I have nothing to say," he answered.

"Is the court to understand that you plead guilty?" inquired the judge.

"I cannot say what the court understands."

"Is not that a virtual confession that you were either the murderer, or accessory thereto?"

"I confess nothing."

"Do you deny it?"

"I deny nothing."

The judge knitted his brows, and was puzzled as to what action to take. He had sincerely hoped that the young fellow would be tempted to speak out, and say something in his own behalf. It cut him deeply to see matters going against him, though none would have guessed his feelings from his face.

Thus the three days were occupied by the lawyers for and against the accused. Many chapters of florid rhetoric were furnished to the village newspaper and the eager listeners in the court-room, before the jury retired.

The solemn, thrilling words of the judge, as he gave them their final charge, and brought home to them the awful nature of their responsibility, not one of those twelve men ever forgot.

The tension of feeling in the court-room during that speech was painful.

Three days more were consumed before they could come to a verdict. They had the herculean task of separating their instinctive liking for the prisoner, and their distrust of the witness Hank Staples, from the evidence, as it really stood from a legal point of view. It was hard for them to be obliged to take this fellow's evidence against a gentleman; but in the strange nature of the case, his was the only direct evidence produced by the trial, and there was nothing brought out by the defense which could antagonize it. The circumstances all coincided with it perfectly. Few people in the world would have suspected Hank Staples of ingenuity enough (even had they known his motive) to concoct this plan of evidence to suit the circumstances. In so much had they underrated him. The wound in Marlowe's arm, the failure of the prisoner to account for it otherwise, all were arguments in favor of the prosecution, which it was impossible for the jury, in accordance with their oath, to ignore, and after a long battle with themselves, they finally brought in their verdict.

It was: "Guilty of murder."

The prisoner was then asked in the usual formula, "Have you anything to say why sentence should not be pronounced upon you according to law?"

Again he answered:

"Nothing."

CHAPTER XV

Marlowe had risen to receive his sentence. The whole body of listeners held its breath in one emotion of intense anxiety. In the court his friends vastly predominated. The love story of Walter and little Laurie McNaughton had been cruelly dragged into public view, and the pity of it all—Marlowe's pale face, Laurie's somber mourning, and above all, the extreme youth and beauty of both—went straight to the heart of every woman, and many men, in the house

Judge Napier arose amid the breathless hush, and stepped forward. For the first time in his life, he had not been able to form an opinion in his own mind as to the innocence or guilt of the accused, but in his stanch old heart he loved him for the manly courage that refused to criminate his companions,—which the avowal of his own innocence would of course do. He looked at the

young fellow, standing there in jeopardy of his life, yet refusing to stoop or purchase mercy.

He thought of the days when Walter and his own beloved boy had played together in school-boy comradeship; and the contrast of this youth standing up to face, perhaps, the consequences of their common misdeeds, and his own Harry hiding his head, a fugitive from the law, smote the proud man deeply, and for a moment he almost envied the broken old white-haired minister his son.

It was the same temper that spoke in the actions of these three men—the Southern character in its best estate. The youth who would not buy his safety with dishonor, the father who would not urge his son to a cowardly act though the result was hastening his gray hairs to the grave, and the judge who did honor to the magnificent heroism of the young man, while he pronounced the inevitable verdict upon his legally proven act.

The judge paused for the briefest instant, then addressed the prisoner by name.

Marlowe returned his look unflinchingly, though a bright flush rose to his face, and

faded again, leaving it, if possible, a shade paler than before. He felt the eyes upon him, the eyes of familiar friends and companions of his college days.

In the dead silence that preceded the next words, the sound of a rider approaching the court-house and abruptly halting was distinctly heard. The next minute a confusion of voices at the door; then, parting the dense throng in a way that belonged to him, the tall form of Harry Napier appeared in the house. He was travel-stained, and his spurred heel on the hard floor made a strange sound in the hush that pervaded the great crowd as he walked up the aisle.

The judge stood speechless, staring at the apparition.

The young man approached the judge's bench, and took off his hat; he turned first toward the jury box, then to the house, and in his ringing voice said: "Gentlemen of the court, and you who are interested in the trial of my friend Walter Marlowe for the killing of Major McNaughton, I am here, an unannounced witness, with important evidence to

present, before judgment is pronounced upon the accused. Can I be heard?"

The thing was irregular and the prosecution demurred, but the abruptness of his entrance had paralyzed all movements for the moment, and overruled authority.

The judge had resumed his seat, his eyes fixed in a horrible fascination upon his son. A presentiment of coming evil froze his blood. What would the madcap do now? Was he going to take the guilt upon himself to free his friend? The thought benumbed his faculties and he sat like one deprived of his reason.

A feeling of relief had electrified the house at sight of Napier. At last, they thought, the strange silence would be broken.

There was a diversion of a few seconds and some one rushed with wild eyes and ashen cheek, from the court-room. It was the witness, Hank Staples, who, when Napier entered, found the atmosphere of the room too close for him and made a mad dash for the open air.

Napier saw his opportunity and took advantage of the confusion. He knew this was ir-

regular, that his evidence could not be legally taken in this way, but his object was to be heard—only to be heard, at any cost.

“Honored sir,” he continued, turning to the judge, “I am aware that this proceeding does not conform to the customs of this court, but I have evidence to give which will justify the intrusion.”

He drew a folded paper from his breast and glanced hurriedly over it.

“This paper contains the statement I wish to make.”

The judge still sat speechless gazing at him; the counsel for the prosecution rose to protest, but he would not be silenced. He was desperate and in his rashest mood.

“One moment,” he said, “and I have finished. I am one of the number under indictment for the murder of Major McNaughton, and escaped the night the order was issued for our arrest, as I supposed that all the rest had done. A week ago I learned of my friend’s arrest; had I known of his long imprisonment I should have returned sooner.”

Here he looked steadily at the prisoner.

Marlowe returned the look with one which said plainly: "Will you break that oath after all I have suffered to keep it?"

Napier understood the look and smiled, a strange enigma of a smile—they had loved each other well, these two. He went on rapidly.

"I did not believe it possible until now that Walter Marlowe could be convicted here upon the evidence of a low-bred scoundrel, though such has been the case. I have been warned by a signal arranged between friends of the prisoner's and mine of the verdict of the jury; I learn that that verdict is a conviction of murder and—I am here."

A murmur went through the assembly. Would *he* break the oath? was the excited query now; and all those at all familiar with the time and place where this event was transpiring, will realize the extreme exaggeration, the exalted and overstrained sentiment which attached to such an oath, and the terrible consequences to the self-respect of the man who should break it. Adherence to the letter of an oath, at any price, was the fetish at

whose shrine these young fellows would sacrifice anything,—excepting a friend, no one had ever been called upon to do that before.

How would he decide?

Every eye watched him, every ear hung upon his words. The aged fathers of each of the men sat mute spectators of the scene.

The prisoner, the witness and the judge were objects of the greatest interest, but the one eye that never left the speaker, was that of the judge. Suddenly he sprang forward with a loud cry and staggered towards his son.

The young man had raised his hand at the words, "I am here," and the report of a pistol shot followed the cry. He had taken the folded paper in his left hand. He fired with the weapon at his temple, and death was instantaneous. He fell backward without a contortion and died as he had lived, rashly and fearlessly.

The prisoner started up at the report, with a deep self-anathema upon his lips that he had not foreseen this ending and forestalled it. But the hand of the officer was upon his

shoulder, and he fell back into his seat, realizing the futility of all effort now.

Harry, the prince, the idol of his fellows, had gone to render his account before another Judge and Father, in the court of Him who gave that wild, ungovernable spirit, and who, alone, could judge it justly.

The old judge uttered no sound after that first wild cry; he knelt by his son, his hand upon the boy's forehead, pushing the hair back from it and gazing steadily upon the beloved face.

They had taken the paper and read its contents. Some one touched the old man upon the shoulder. He rose with an abstracted look and adjusted his dress in a mechanical way. He looked about him for an instant, then with something like the ghost of his old manner tottered to his seat. Unbending to the last, he, the judge, would end the matter in the judge's place.

After some legal forms had been gone through Marlowe's counsel moved a suspension of sentence, and the judge announced that it was granted. The accused was remanded to prison.

CHAPTER XVI

The story of Napier's testimony and the change it had wrought in the aspect of Marlowe's trial was well known, but the citizens of C— were eager to know the exact substance of it. It was the first morning of the new trial. The same crowd was assembled to hear the end of the strange drama. There was only one familiar face missing; a younger man sat in the stead of the venerable judge whose place should know him no more; that stanch old heart was broken at last.

There was a whispered conference among the attorneys, and presently, defendant's counsel rose with the fateful paper in his hand.

"Your Honor," he said, "we have come into possession of new evidence in this case, and although the manner in which it was received is irregular and almost without precedent in any court, it is indispensable that it should

be heard. With permission of the counsel for the prosecution, I will read it."

The lawyer for the state acquiesced and with an unconscious solemnity in his voice, he unfolded the paper and began.

This was the testimony of Harry Napier: "I solemnly swear, in the name of that God in whose presence I will be when this testimony is taken, that the evidence herein contained concerning the death of Major McNaughton which occurred on the night of June —th is the whole truth. The people of C—are familiar with the nature of that oath of the 'mid knights,' which binds all the parties in that tragical event to silence; that it is equally binding on the guilty, and on the innocent; and I am confident that not a man among our member would break that oath to save his own life. It has been a matter of pride with us to keep it.

"The escapade that brought about the tragedy of that June night, began in mere sport, the real wrong in it being, I now see, in leading the major astray, and using him for our amusement when confused with rum; but

even of this, I exonerate Marlowe; he was, on that night, and always, the major's true friend. Our party was on the way to escort the old man home, because Marlowe insisted upon doing so, and we were not willing to lose him.

"Major McNaughton had been drinking heavily. When we attempted to cross the ford of the river near his house, the major's horse—the mare Senora, of whom he was passionately fond—lost her footing, went over the rocks and was killed. When the major, whom Marlowe had rescued from the water, saw the mare was drowning, he attempted to rush in and save her. To do so in his condition, would have been suicide. I put my arms around him and held him back. This rendered him furious and when he saw the horse was gone, he turned and struck me with the whip he carried in his hand. I remember nothing between the insult of those repeated blows, and the motion with which I stabbed him once, twice, and three times. But I exonerate one and all of my companions from having any hand in it whatever. Marlowe received the

wound in his arm in trying to stay my hand. In a moment the deed was done. I besought my companions to leave me and I would bear the consequences of my own deed; but then came the memory of that oath of the 'mid-knights,' which binds all alike, and we again shook hands and pledged ourselves anew to silence even to the bitter end.

"To baffle pursuit, we resolved to hold no communication with each other for a year. We did not know of Marlowe's engagement to the major's daughter, nor that he returned to C— after our final parting. I would to God that I had known how matters stood with him, the knowledge might have stayed my hand, even then, when I felt the stinging blows of that man's whip across my face,—I did not know.

"All this I learned but a few days ago, when, after becoming restless and tired of travel, I returned, and learned also that our plan of mutual silence was rendered worthless by the false witness of Hank Staples, whom we allowed to accompany us that fatal night, merely out of regard for the major's feelings.

His evidence is totally false. I do not take this course in the mistaken idea that there is anything heroic in what I do; there is no other way. To have lived to see my friend suffering for my deed, or to go through the world with the infamy of the broken oath would be worse than death. There is one saving clause in the oath of the 'mid-knights;' the last paragraph runs in this way:

"In the name of heaven, and in the presence of you my companions, I do solemnly swear that I will never reveal the secrets of this night, *so long as I shall live*. So help me God!"

Below was written the following:

"Adieu, my friends, forgive but do not forget me.

"(Signed.)

HARRY NAPIER."

Then was added a P. S.:

"I would ask of my friend Walter Marlowe that he will spare no pains to let the others know, wherever they may be wandering over the earth, through their loyalty to their oath and to me, that the price is paid, and the stigma lifted from their names."

The lawyer finished and a dead silence followed his words. With that tragic sight of yesterday fresh in their memory, this parting message from the dead affected the people deeply.

The rest was a matter of form only. The state's attorney arose and said: "Your Honor, on the strength of this new evidence, I move a *nolle prosequi*, that the case be dismissed and the prisoner stand acquitted."

Marlowe was then pronounced a free man. Friends gathered round him—tearful congratulations from the women, the firm grasp of friendship from the men—but all instinctively drew back when two old negroes approached through the crowd with a little black-robed figure between them.

When the brave young fellow who had borne up under so much, saw Laurie coming and, forgetting all else, held out his arms to her, the least delicate of them all felt an impulse to avert the head. Old Ben and Viney sat down upon the floor and wept for joy.

His mother awaited them, propped upon the pillows of her sick room—into which we may not follow.

One day when spring had come again, Walter Marlowe and Laurie stood by the grave of Harry Napier. He bared his head while she stooped down and laid a cluster of white blossoms upon the mound—it was her wedding wreath. She was crying softly, but in his face was a look of sorrow too great for such expression.

In the road near by waited the carriage that was to speed them on their wedding journey. When they looked back again to wave him a last adieu the sunlight struck a golden gleam across the marble headstone, and they knew it was shining on the words their gratitude had carved there:

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

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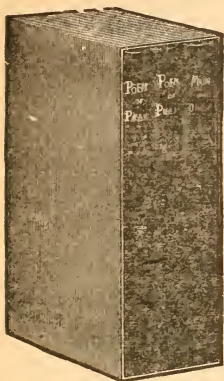
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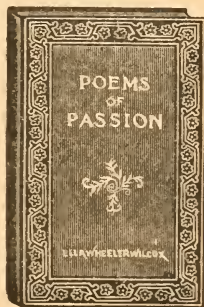
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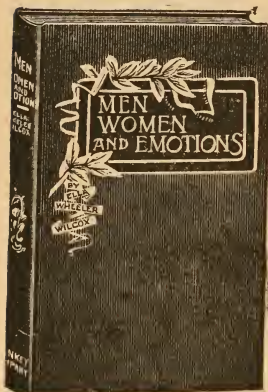
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